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Agape Victor -

Gustaf Aulén's

Picture-of-God

as Agape Love

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Abstract

This essay looks at Agape Love as the self-declared central theme of the theology of Swedish Lutheran theologian and bishop Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977). I do this by looking at three of his books published in Swedish between 1927 and 1931 when he was Professor in Systematic Theology at Lund University. Having established that he views agape as “spontaneous, self-giving, free, sovereign” love, I then go on to critique his Law-Love dichotomy between the two Testaments and question the minimal use of the Trinity in his work. With these correctives in place, I suggest that embracing the OT view-of-God and the NT’s Trinitarianism deepens and enhances Aulén’s understanding of God’s Agape Love.

Keywords: *Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor, Agape, Love of God, Lundensian School, Lutheran, Swedish Church, Swedish Lutheran Church, Svenska kyrkan, Trinity, doctrine of God, gudsbild, picture-of-God, view-of-God, conception of God, Krister Stendahl*

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PART 1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1. The Research Project



1.1. Overview of Dissertation

In this essay I write about and critically reflect upon Swedish theologian, Gustaf Aulén's picture-of-God which centres of the notion of agape. After initial chapters about theories and methods that underlie this study (Chapter 1 and 2), I will then round off my introduction with a final chapter which introduces Aulén's ecclesiastical setting to contextualise my subject within his own Swedish milieu in the interwar period (Chapter 3). Next, I elucidate Aulén's views of agape by looking at what he says about this topic in three of his books that were written between 1927 and 1931 when he was a professor of systematic theology at Lund University. These are in chronological order, *Den Kristna Guds bilden* (DKG), *Christus Victor* (CV), and *Den Allmänneliga Kristna Tron* (DAKT). I will look at these one at a time (Chapters 4-6) before summarises my findings in Chapter 7. The next two chapters offer a critical reflection of Aulén's views in the light of developments in theology which have flourished after his death in 1977. I start by questioning his view of the Law with help from writers from within the group of theologians promoting the New Perspective on Paul (henceforth NPP), principally Krister Stendahl and E.P. Sanders (Chapter 8). In the penultimate chapter, I discuss Aulén's view of the Trinity, a picture-of-God that owes an

¹ Lund University, c 1900. Aulén was ordained as a Swedish Lutheran priest in 1907 at Uppsala and moved to Lund to become a professor in 1914.

increased prominence in systematic theology thanks to Karl Barth and those who have followed through his thought, such as Colin E. Gunton (Chapter 9). Finally, I summarise my thoughts on Aulén's *Agape Victor* and make some suggestions for future study (Chapter 10).

1.2. Chapter Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the development of this thesis. Firstly, I write about my choice of Gustaf Aulén as the subject of the essay and the ensuing research questions. In the second section, I will be suggesting the material I will use for this project. In the third and most substantial section, Research Trends, I will be reviewing what has been written about Aulén over the last fifty years. In a final section, I will conclude that the centre of his thought, agape, will be the primary focus of my thesis.

1.3. Aulén and my Research Questions

I will be studying the work of Swedish Lutheran Bishop, Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977), whose work on the doctrine of atonement, *CV* is world renowned and considered “one of the most influential soteriological books of the twentieth century”.² As a British citizen who moved to Sweden nearly ten years ago and now has Swedish nationality, my choice of Aulén has a lot to do with my dual identity. It reflects my own wish to become more familiar with Swedish theology whilst at the same time wanting to investigate a theme that will have global appeal. Living in Sweden and having the privilege of being able to read Swedish means I have access to a range of original source material of Aulén's works which has never been translated into English.³ For example, I will be using my own translation “picture-of-God” as my own translation of the Swedish word *gudsbild* which is an important concept in his work.⁴

So, my research question is: *what is Aulén's picture-of-God and how do theological developments which occurred after his death help in re-evaluating this view of Agape Love?* This question has come about because my review of the current trends in research, below, reveals that the role of agape in Aulén's work has been ignored. The dissonance between the central place agape has in Aulén's own worldview and the lack of consideration of it in the literature is striking. If *CV* is Aulén's “business card”⁵ to the world, perhaps this discrepancy

² Spjuth, 2017, 389.

³ For example, *DKG* and the third edition of *DAKT* has never been translated into English, and these are two of my three main texts.

⁴ I explain in detail my reasoning behind this decision in Chapter 5, as well as discussing the challenges of bilingualism in my Appendix 1.

⁵ Aulén, 1975, 120. My trans. “visitkort”.

relates to his presentation in this essential work? Therefore, it seems important to address the question, *does Aulén talk about agape in CV?* Then I will go on to consider the question of *what does agape mean in Aulén's work?* Here *DKG* and *DAKT* will play a foundational role in allowing Aulén to express his own views on this essential subject.

Once I have established that agape is a central theme in Aulén's oeuvre and what the word means to him, I will then be able to critically evaluate his views. Given the enormous influence of the Lundensian School in Sweden and abroad, I believe it is then valid to ask, *what consequences can these views have had in theology?* In particular, I will focus on the role the Law plays in his and subsequent works.

The question I will consider in my last chapter before the conclusion is, *what role does the Trinity play in Aulén's picture-of-God?* This reflects the increased focus on Trinitarian theologies in his discipline of systematic theology since the 1970s.

1.4. Material

1.4.1 Agape in Gustaf Aulén's Theology

I have chosen to study the agape motif in the theology of Gustaf Aulén, focusing on three of his books from his time as a professor in Lund. This topic has partly been chosen by negative factors in that there are certain areas of his work which have been well covered before. This primarily relates to *CV* and his *lex creationis* theories. However, there are positive "pull factors" towards choosing the agape motif as the focus of this study.

Firstly, as observed above, agape is Aulén's self-stated centre of his theology. But because of the ubiquitous association of his name and the *CV* theory, it is easy to think that the centre must be the atonement. But for Aulén, there is a prior cause to Christ's saving work and that is God's Agape Love. I believe it is important to demonstrate this fact to better understand Aulén's whole oeuvre.

It appears that no one has undertaken to survey the whole of his work, written an "Aulén reader" or an "introduction to Aulén" as can be found with many of his contemporaries. The nearest I have been able to find are several summaries of his work written by colleagues when he was 90 years old or obituaries written after he passed away on 16 December 1977.⁶ These texts do not offer any sustained critique of his work but are, for obvious reasons, descriptive and complimentary in tone.⁷ By writing about the central theme

⁶ Bring, 1969.

⁷ e.g., Erling, 1978; Gerhardsson, 1994.

of Aulén's oeuvre I hope to make a positive contribution to Aulén studies by addressing the fact that currently there are no overviews of his work available.

1.4.2. Material to be Considered

My study will be of a literary nature focusing on Aulén's own published theological books in the Swedish language, although it must be acknowledged that Jonas Jonson's comprehensive 400-page biography of Aulén, which has only been published in Swedish, has been an essential guide to Aulén's world and theology.⁸ Jonson (b. 1939) was Bishop of Strängnäs between 1989 and 2005 taking on the role that Aulén had previously occupied some 50 years earlier. He notes that when Aulén went into retirement and wrote *Dramat och Symbolerna* (1965)⁹ and *Kristen Gudstro i Förändringens Värld* (1967),¹⁰ it was to round off his theological career by revisiting what he considered to be the most important themes of his theology.¹¹ These leitmotifs had been explored in the three books which were published during his time as a professor in Lund and it is this earlier trilogy which will form the basis of my study. It goes without saying that *CV*, which was first published in Swedish in 1930, will be one of them. The other two books from his professorship are the first edition of *DKG* from 1927 and the third edition of *DAKT* from 1931. These are two of Aulén's larger texts, both over 400 pages, which form the bedrock of his thinking. The first is primarily a historical overview, whilst the second is a systematic presentation of the Christian faith and Aulén himself says that they complement each other.¹² *DAKT* is Aulén's most well-read work after *CV* and Capps notes that it was a standard textbook for Lutheran priests in Sweden and in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s.¹³

Together, these three books make up about 1000 pages of Aulén's own thought from a condensed period of just four years (1927–1931) towards the end of his twenty-year professorship at Lund which ended in 1933 when Aulén was 54 years old. They cover his views of many of the most important theologians of church history and touch on all the main topics of systematic theology. There is a rich treasure of ideas to be explored, trains of thought to be considered and theses to be challenged within this copious theological depositary.

⁸ Jonson, 2011. It is far superior to Aulén's own autobiography (Aulén, 1975) which is popular rather than academic in content.

⁹ Aulén 1970; Aulén, 1965b.

¹⁰ Aulén, 1967.

¹¹ See Jonson, 2011, 359-360.

¹² Aulén, 1941, 4.

¹³ Capps, 1996, 60–61.

1.5. Research Trends

Given that these three books cover such a wide range of topics, it has been important to understand what other authors have written about Aulén before finding the right area to investigate. So, much of this chapter will be taken up with exploring what has been said about Aulén over the last fifty years.

Aulén features in several books about the atonement, but outside this narrow field his name is rarely mentioned. So, I have focused my reading on articles about him, twenty-three in total, that have published in English, German and Swedish between 1972 and 2021. These are written, almost exclusively, by white -male -Protestants. This secondary literature can be sorted into four thematic areas; i) CV accounts for half of the papers I have read; ii) Aulén's theology of creation, his *lex creationis*,¹⁴ represents a quarter of the secondary material. The remaining quarter of research papers are divided between; iii) historical studies; iv) sundry papers, which I have collected under the heading of 'Aulén and the Lutheran Tradition'.

1.5.1. Trend 1 – *Christus Victor*

Aulén's famous work put forward a new understanding of the development of the doctrine of atonement in Western church history. He suggests that the patristic era was dominated by the classical view which interprets the atonement first and foremost as Christ's victory over satan. Then in the Middle Ages, Anselm formulated the Latin or objective theory which became widespread, but at the Reformation Luther recovered the classic idea.¹⁵ Then, later Lutheran scholasticism laid the Latin approach over the Reformer's own thought so that the orthodox Protestant consensus has been Anselmian. Aulén also talks about a third approach, the subjective theory of the atonement, but it plays a minor role in his work and so in the secondary literature it is rarely featured at all.

On top of this historical revisionism, Aulén lays a particular stress on the divine initiative in the atonement, almost to the total exclusion of the human aspects of the person of Christ. He finds this in Irenaeus and Luther, but believes it is missed in Anselm, who focuses on the human Jesus making a sacrifice to appease God.

¹⁴ Aulén, 1954, 188ff; Aulén, 1943, 209ff..

¹⁵ Note Aulén's use of different terms; he always talks in terms of the classic or dramatic "*idea*" or "*motif*" of the atonement, but the objective or subjective "*theory*" or "*doctrine*" of reconciliation, see Aulén, 1931b, 157; In Swedish this is the contrast between "*försoningsmotivet*" for the former and "*försoningsteorin*" or "*försoningsläran*" for the latter two. Aulén, 1930, 265. Italics in original texts.

The contentious elements of the work pertain to; i) whether he has accurately understood the doctrine in Irenaeus, Anselm and Luther; ii) whether his emphasis on the divine initiative to the exclusion of the human's sacrifice in the work of Christ is a correct interpretation of the passion and resurrection. It is surprising given the status of Aulén's theory, that the secondary texts are almost unanimous that his historical reconstruction is inaccurate at every point.

Meyer and Ljungh both expose shortcomings in Aulén's analysis of his key witness from the patristic period, Irenaeus of Lyon.¹⁶ They both show that this Church Father saw the work of Christ as not just a work of God, but also the work of Jesus the man.¹⁷ Meyer continues by confronting Aulén's interpretation of the patristic period by reviewing the doctrine of atonement in fifteen theologians from the first five centuries of church history.¹⁸ This thorough approach points out that, contra Aulén, the satisfaction and the drama motifs are both present in that era. The same critique can be drawn of Aulén's interpretation of Luther. The reformer's texts do not only show a belief in the classical view, but, that he also believed in the objective theory at the same time.¹⁹

Aulén believed the weakness in Anselm's approach stems from the fact that he has the medieval idea of penance at the forefront of his thoughts. Because Anselm thought that a human's works could save them from purgatory, this is reflected in his doctrine of atonement where the man Jesus of Nazareth offers himself to God to fulfil humanity's obligation of worship. Aulén therefore dismisses Anselm's Latin Theory as a form of works-righteousness not fitting with the gospel of grace. Several authors suggest the problem with Aulén's approach is that it does not add up with Anselm's own writings.²⁰ So, whereas Aulén sees in Anselm a man offering himself as the means of salvation, his critics show that the medieval theologian himself thought that God was actively at work in the death of Christ.

CV is Aulén's most famous work and, whilst it will be unavoidable during my study, I do not intend to make the atonement the centre of my work many others have achieved this aim with great success.

¹⁶ Ljungh, 2010; Meyer 2020.

¹⁷ Ljungh, 2010, 178; Meyer, 2020, 304.

¹⁸ Meyer, 2020. Taylor also comes to the same conclusions without the breadth of research evident in Meyer. See Taylor, 2021, Online: <https://www.radicalreformation.com/299-dean-s-thoughts/1558-kingdom-reductionism>, n.p.

¹⁹ Peters, 1972 and Kilcrease 2018a..

²⁰ e.g., Kuivenhoven, 2017, Peters, 1972 and Stott, 1986. For example, "upon closer examination of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, Aulén's evaluation seems unfair, for God is no less responsible for the atonement in this view. than he is in the Classic theory" from Peters 1972, 301.

1.5.2. Trend 2 – *Lex Creationis*

The second most popular theme in the secondary literature based on Aulén is his *lex creationis*. It is widely acknowledged that his emphasis on creation represents a change from his earlier theology. Jonson²¹ dates this to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia on 3 October 1935 and Ljungh²² to the fourth edition of *DAKT* which was published in Swedish 1943. In either case, the theme played an increasing role in his theology, therefore, I will use one of his later works, *Kristen Gudstro i Förändringens Värld*, to explain his thought.²³

Aulén writes from a Lutheran perspective, acknowledging that God’s Law is a positive force given at creation to fight evil, for example, so that “order exists instead of chaos”.²⁴ This Law is an act of God’s Agape Love and it is therefore eternal and unchanging.²⁵ It is also binding on all humanity, a universal demand for the whole species to “*take care*”²⁶ of creation regardless of whether they call themselves Christian or not.²⁷ He is way ahead of his time in applying this to the problems of pollution and the environment.²⁸

However, Engdahl suggests that one of the weaknesses of Aulén’s mature thought is that he does not integrate the two themes in his oeuvre – the atonement and creation - so there is little cross-fertilization between them.²⁹ Conversely, others, have found Aulén’s approach helpful in developing their own theology of creation. His thoughts regarding creation have been adopted by a wider 20th-century theological movement called Scandinavian Creation Theology (SCT). One of the other key players in the foundation of this movement was Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000), a younger member of the Lundensian School. Together their thoughts have become catalysts to a way of thinking which has emerged in the Nordic countries. So, when Swedish Lutheran theologian, Elisbeth Gerle, looks at Aulén’s work she is particularly interested in the fact that his approach is linked with an active resistance to German social nationalism. Writing during the COVID–19 crisis, she believes that the universal elements in SCT can provide a voice for the marginalised in society who, especially during the pandemic, found themselves more excluded than usual.³⁰ On the other hand, American Lutheran, Ted F. Peters, is more critical of Aulén’s version of SCT. He feels that it drives a too large wedge

²¹ Jonson, 2011, 194.

²² Ljungh, 2012, 183.

²³ Aulén, 1967, 76–80.

²⁴ Aulén, 1967, 77. My trans. “ordning skapas i stället för kaos”.

²⁵ Aulén, 1967, 77.

²⁶ Aulén, 1967, 78. My trans. “Det gäller primärt ett krav på *omsorg* om skapelsen”, italics in original.

²⁷ Aulén, 1967, 79.

²⁸ Aulén, 1967, 79.

²⁹ Engdahl, 2019b.

³⁰ Gerle, 2021.

between science and faith so that the two cannot talk to each other. He prefers a “model of *hypothetical consonance*, according to which there is consonance between “what can be said scientifically about the natural world and what the theologian understands to be God's creation””.³¹

Whilst there are many interesting aspects of Aulén's theology of creation to be explored, I will not be addressing this area of his thought in this essay. That is because the three books that I am focusing on were written before Aulén had formulated his *lex creationis* idea. However, I will be exploring Aulén's earlier notion of the Law in Chapter 8.

1.5.3. Trend 3 – Historical Studies

Aulén lived for almost one hundred years during which Sweden (and the rest of Europe) underwent enormous socio-political changes. So, it no surprise that some authors have written studies that focus on historical elements of his epoch. For some, Aulén's relationship to the World War Two (henceforth WW2) is of interest,³² whilst for others, his relationship with other members of the Lundensian School, which flourished in the first half of the 20th-century, is the priority.³³ But, it must be noted that the future of historical studies around the life and times of Aulén will be hard pressed to beat the comprehensiveness of Jonson's biography which also adopts many of the most interesting insights from Aulén's own autobiography which was published in Swedish in 1975. So, this is an area I will not be focusing on, other than to outline Aulén's ecclesiastical context in Chapter 3.

1.5.4. Trend 4 – Aulén and the Lutheran Tradition

To round off this section, it is worth noting that there are a few papers based on a single issue in Aulén's work. As the Swede developed his own *via media*, he reflected upon and reinterpreted his Lutheran tradition in creative ways. Some of these ideas are reflected in individual papers, include one in English on free will and determinism by Kraal³⁴ and two different papers in German, one on Augustine³⁵ and the other on Aulén's view of faith and revelation.³⁶ These are largely unexplored areas of Aulén's thought and further study into how his theology relates to these wider issues in Lutheranism could lead to fruitful studies.

³¹ Peters, 2018, 129, italics in original. He is quoting Danish theologian, Niels Henrik Gregersen (b.1956).

³² e.g., Schjerring 2005 and Oredsson, 1997.

³³ e.g., Capps, 1996, Bexell, 1980.

³⁴ Kraal, 2013.

³⁵ Nygren, 1960.

³⁶ Rainer, 1968.

1.6. Conclusion

Whilst Aulén has been well read both in and outside Sweden, no-one, as far as I can see, has explored Aulén's version of God's Agape Love, what it means and how it might influence his thought, even though it is his self-proclaimed central theme. For example, Aulén recorded in his autobiography that a journalist had once asked him about what was the most important part of his work. His response was, "In the language of the Bible, it is, God is love, agape".³⁷ So whilst many have talked about his view of the atonement no one has acknowledged what Aulén believes is the source of Christ's victory, Divine Agape Love. Arguably this is to do a dis-service to his theological project. In fact, to talk about Aulén without addressing his understanding of Agape Love is to not understand the Swede on his own terms.

³⁷ Jonson, 2011, 360; Aulén, 1975, 219. My trans. "På Bibelns språk heter det, Gud är kärleken, agape".

Chapter 2. Method and Theory



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2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will consider the methods and theories used in this study. In particular, I will be using the “single overriding conception” methodology which I have gleaned from considering how other authors have approached their theologian of interest. My study has also been influenced by the biography of Jonson (mentioned in the previous chapter) as well as Carlisle’s accounts of Kierkegaard’s life and thought. When it comes to theory, I have assessed Aulén’s work in relation to later two theological trends; firstly, the NT Studies work that has received the name, NPP; secondly, from a distinctly Trinitarian stand point within systematic theology, particularly in dialogue with ideas of Barthian theologian, Colin E. Gunton (1941–2003).

2.2. Methodology

I mentioned in the previous chapter that no detailed overview of Aulén’s work seemed to have been written, so one of the aims of this work is to provide a way to understand his whole oeuvre. However, there are a huge variety of ways in which authors have written about their theologian of choice and below I will describe why I have chosen the approach which American theologian George Hunsinger (b. 1945) labels as the “single overriding

³⁸ Lund University library, 1929. This coincides with the research period and Aulén may have sat in this room to work on the lectures that became CV during autumn 1929-winter 1930.

conception”.³⁹ In considering how to look at Aulén, I have deliberately looked a wide range of material written about other systematic theologians or significant people in Swedish church history whom were contemporaneous with him.⁴⁰ That process has led to a closer consideration on two works on Karl Barth (1886–1968) and one author’s works on Søren Kierkegaard (1813– 1855) which have played an important role in the formation of this study.

2.2.1 Barth and Aulén

Whilst this essay is not about Aulén’s relationship to Barth, the Swiss theologian was just seven years younger than him and it has been impossible to avoid the Reformed thinker’s work as he is arguably the most important systematic theologian of the 20th-century. Therefore, his name appears several times in this section on method and theory. He and Aulén shared much in common as theologians who were not German but were immersed in pre-war German theology and then became active in their opposition to the Third Reich. They both reacted to 19th-century liberal theology by trying to negotiate a *via media* between liberalism and fundamentalism. Barth’s version would be called neo-orthodoxy whilst Aulén’s thought was labelled as part of the Lundensian School. Therefore, it seems appropriate to look at how people have written about him as a basis for how I could write about Aulén.

2.2.2 Bromiley’s Four Methods

Englishman, Geoffrey Bromiley (1915–2009) notes in the very first paragraph of his book that there are several different ways to approach the Barth’s work.⁴¹ Using my own words to summarise them, they are; i) the historical study, which is focused on the socio-political background that formed Barth’s thought; ii) the theological biography, which focuses on the interaction between the person and their theology; iii) the development approach, which looks at the way his thought developed over time; iv) the single overriding conception, where a single theme from outside Barth’s thought is used as a mirror to reflect on the Swiss thinker’s work. He also rejects the idea that Barth can be approached through the lens of one single

³⁹ Hunsinger, 1991, 3.

⁴⁰ I have considered works about Søren Kierkegaard (b. 1813), Carl Olof Rosenius (b.1816), Gustaf Aulén, (b.1879), Lewi Pethrus (b.1884), Karl Barth (b.1886), Paul Tillich (b.1886), C.S. Lewis (b. 1898), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (b. 1906), Gustaf Wingren (b. 1910) and Dag Hammarskjöld (b. 1913). A significant omission is Anders Nygren (b. 1890).

⁴¹ Bromiley, 2001, ix.

theme and, like Hunsinger, below, notes that Barth denied from the outset that this is possible.⁴²

2.2.3. Hunsinger's Three Methods

Hunsinger has also written an introduction to Barth but from his theologically postliberal stance. He helpfully outlines his methodology correcting two different approaches that have been used to try to deal with Barth. His first target is those works which attempt to analyse the Swiss Reformer using just one “single overriding conception”.⁴³ He then takes to task four Barthian scholars and shows how they (inadequately) interpret Barth through only one hermeneutical lens.⁴⁴ He spends less time dismissing a second approach which is exemplified by a fifth scholar. This is Hartwell⁴⁵ who presented Barth's material under a series of headings without trying to join up any of these disconnected themes. Hunsinger calls this second way of organising the material as “the *loci* approach” and Bromiley's own approach is like this one.

Having identified two extremes of Barth-interpretation, Hunsinger opts for the middle ground and in the process rejects both the single pole of unity and the total disunity models. This third approach is neither one dimensional, nor nihilistic but rather embraces plurality. He suggests that as we read Barth we can find “Several recurrent “motifs” or modes of thought”⁴⁶ so that in *Church Dogmatics* we can observe “a flexible but unmistakeable repertoire of “thought forms””.⁴⁷ I will call this third method the recurrent motifs approach.

In summary, these two authors outline six different ways to approach writing a theological overview which I have labelled; i) the single overriding conception; ii) the *loci*-approach; iii) the multiple motifs approach; iv) historical study; v) theological biography; and vi) the development approach.

2.2.4 Approaching Aulén: the Single Overriding Conception

I will now consider these different ways to approach a theologian's oeuvre in relation to the existing works about Aulén that I discussed in the literature review in the previous chapter. There I noted that several people have written about Aulén from the perspective of both a historical study and theological biography. I have purposely chosen to concentrate this study

⁴² Bromiley, 2001, xi.

⁴³ Hunsinger, 1991, 3.

⁴⁴ Hunsinger, 1991, 6–23.

⁴⁵ Hunsinger, 1991, 19–22.

⁴⁶ Hunsinger, 1991, 4.

⁴⁷ Hunsinger, 1991, 5–6.

on a small time period and therefore the development approach is not appropriate for this essay, although could be applied to his work in subsequent studies. Aulén himself rejected the loci approach to theology because it does not respect that the discipline is an organic discipline, a whole unit, where changes in one doctrine will inevitably lead to changes in another.⁴⁸ This attitude to theology and his commitment to the centrality of Agape Love means that *the single overriding conception* is the most natural way to approach Aulén's work from those six approaches presented by Bromiley and Hunsinger. This is not to say that he only talks about love or that multiple motifs do not reoccur in his work. But nonetheless, this approach acts as a reminder that whatever else he might stand for, Agape Love is a single paradigm through which Aulén believes he interprets the Christian faith. This can be seen clearly in *DKG*, which attempts to review the whole of Church history through the grid of later thinkers' faithfulness to the basic motif of the Christian faith, God's Agape Love.⁴⁹ Or in the third edition of *DAKT* that I am using, where he outlines the three sections of his work after the prolegomena as different reflections of agape.⁵⁰

Furthermore, it must also be recognised that Aulén wrote in a modern milieu where a single absolute truth was a viable academic concept. Whilst Hunsinger's unity-and-diversity model is appropriate because of the volume and complexity of Barth's thought and partly reflects the philosophical mood of the later 20th-century, it seems alien to Aulén's world, particularly as my research period around the year 1930, where single overarching metanarratives were the norm. For example, the whole aim of the Lundensian approach was to discover the genuine Christian faith, stripped of all later accretions using scientifically proven methods that all could access, a project rooted in modernistic concepts.⁵¹ There are similarities in his style to British academic and popular theologian, C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), who was nineteen years younger than Aulén and who depended on logic and reason in his approach. Between 1941 and 1944 Lewis was defending Christianity on British radio with the talks that would become his classic, *Mere Christianity*.⁵² A few years later, Aulén was also involved in a public debate on the reasonableness of faith in the wake of Ingemar Hedenius controversial book, *Faith and Knowledge* published in 1949.⁵³ The very tone of this debate is

⁴⁸ Aulén, 1927, 6.

⁴⁹ See Aulén, 1927 and see Chapter 5.

⁵⁰ Aulén, 1931a, 478–481 and see Chapter 6.

⁵¹ See next chapter of Aulén's ecclesiastical context for more on the Lundensian method.

⁵² The overview of Lewis' work I have used is Vaus, 2004.

⁵³ My trans. "*Tro och Vetande*".

deeply modernist - the search for the ultimate truth and the question as to whether that should be guided by science or theology.⁵⁴

2.2.5. Two biographies: Jonson and Carlisle

Whilst I will be trying to follow Aulén's own claim to see agape as the central focus of his work, I have also been influenced by the biography method which I have used as a tool to contextualise Aulén in his space-time setting of Sweden in the late 1920s and early 30s. This is partly related to the fact that Jonson's extensive biography has been my introduction to Aulén's world outside of *CV*.

In addition, I have also been inspired by British philosopher, Clare Carlisle (b.1977) and her "Kierkegaardian biography"⁵⁵ which attempts to address the fact that the Dane's writings and his life were one, a holistic philosophy centred on being, that is the lived life. Carlisle has, therefore, intertwined biographical elements and detailed analysis of his thought and, not infrequently, her own personal reflections, including photos of herself in Denmark. This has encouraged me to include historical photos, portraits and the covers of books I have used to emphasise that Aulén was a real person living in a particular historical-spatial context. Furthermore, her book is both chronological and thematic without strictly being either. It does not start at his birth, but rather when he broke off his engagement in May 1843. This, again, has been an inspiration to not address Aulén's three works chronologically but start with *CV*, as this is the place that almost everyone starts their interactions with the Swede even though it is not the earliest of his works to be published.

So, these biographical elements of my dissertation reflect a desire to present Aulén as a *Swedish* theologian, that is, to contextualise his work. He, and his theology, are a product of a particular time and place. Therefore, I include Chapter 3 on his Swedish ecclesiastical context; give an interpretation of the Swedish theological situation that may have laid behind his writing of *CV* in Chapter 4; use the work of Swedish scholar, Stendahl, to critique Aulén's views in Chapter 8; and use an important insight from his contemporary, Barth, to reconsider the picture-of-God presented by Aulén in Chapter 9. All this is to promote the fact that Aulén was a Swedish theologian who wrote in Swedish in the northern European country of Sweden and was therefore influenced by the particular trends and thoughts of Swedish Christianity in the first 30 years of the 20th-century in his writings.

⁵⁴ Jonson, 2011, 347ff.

⁵⁵ Carlisle, 2019, xiii.

2.2.6. Summary of Method

To summarise, my method will be to start with an overview of the challenges the Swedish Lutheran Church faced in the first 30 years of the 20th-century, which coincides with Aulén's time in academia, first as a student in Uppsala and then as a teacher in Lund. I then will go to look at *CV* and suggest a theological context for that particular work before going on to highlight that the theme of Agape Love is actually a driving force in his view of the atonement. Then, by looking at two larger texts on agape, I will present Aulén's interpretation of love as the essential theme of the Christian faith.

2.3. Theory

Aulén makes 'God is Love' the central motif of the Christian faith and supports his thesis by, among other things, drawing out a dramatic contrast between a NT Love and an OT Law and basing his interpretation of agape on the work of Christ. In this essay I intend to accept his Christocentric interpretation of agape as "spontaneous, self-giving, free and sovereign" love.⁵⁶ However, I do want to widen the base on which this picture-of-God as agape is built by questioning his Law-Love dichotomy and reviewing the role of the Trinity in his work. In this way I aim to incorporate both the OT and NT Trinitarianism as additional "source material" to his definition of agape so that it is not just centred on one interpretation of NT Christology.

2.3.1. Questioning the Role of the Law

My critique of Aulén's interpretation of the Law is primarily based on the work of Krister Stendahl and E.P. Sanders, although other authors who are associated with the NPP have been consulted, including James Dunn and N.T. Wright. Stendahl has been chosen because whilst he is known as a Harvard professor, like Aulén, he was a Swedish Lutheran priest who had studied at Uppsala, where he received his doctorate in 1954 before immediately emigrating to working at Harvard. He did come back to Sweden, but only during the last four years of his working life to become Bishop of Stockholm, before returning to the States in his retirement. His studies in Sweden from c. 1940–1954 are slightly later than my research period but coincided with the zenith of the reception of the Lundensian School in Sweden. Therefore, I suggest there is a direct link between his background as a Swedish Lutheran and the views

⁵⁶ See Chapter 7 for how I have come to this definition. Further work could be done here questioning the validity of his interpretation or, for example, comparing his approach to that of Anders Nygren's famous *Eros och Agape*, volume 1 of which was released in the same year as *CV* so that together they unintentionally developed a global interest in the Lundensian School which previously had been a Swedish Lutheran concern.

expressed in his seminal paper *The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West* from 1963. This broke new ground in the consideration of the Jewishness of the early Christian faith and challenged the perceived view of the Law as a form of works-righteousness. E.P. Sanders took Stendahl's premise and expanded it into a fully worked theory, which he presented in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977 using the term "covenantal nomism" to re-imagine the Jew's relationship to Law at the time of the Second Temple Period. I use these ideas to re-assess the Law-Love dichotomy presented by Aulén and suggest that agape is both an OT and a NT way of thinking about God.

2.3.2. Questioning the Role of the Trinity

At least two things have caused me to re-assess the relationship between Aulén and the Trinitarian doctrine of God. Aulén's starting point for the Law-Love contrast is the question 'what is the difference between a Jewish and Christian view-of-God'? So having taken away his contrast of Law-Love in Chapter 8 it seems natural to fill that void with a viable alternative in Chapter 9. Therefore, I suggest that the distinction between monotheism and Trinitarianism, as they are exhibited in the OT and NT, provides a satisfactory replacement to the Law-Love differentiation presented by Aulén.

Secondly, Aulén was a Professor in Systematic Theology at Lund for 20 years from 1913 before becoming a Bishop and therefore it is natural to take an important theme from his discipline and see how this is reflected in his view-of-God. The Trinity has become a very popular subject in systematic theology since the middle of the 20th-century and in Protestant circles the primary catalyst of this was Barth. One of many theologians who was heavily influenced by him was Gunton, who quips in the preface to his book, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* that "suddenly we are all trinitarians" as he observes the popularity of the subject at the end of the 20th-century.⁵⁷ This book has been influential in my own thinking about the Trinity and therefore is reflected in my assessment of Aulén's approach. In fact, my study inadvertently supports Gunton's observation that Trinitarian theology in the Western Church leans in a monistic direction that tends to underemphasises the 'threeness' of the Trinity.⁵⁸ Aulén follows this propensity and usually views the Christian God only in His 'oneness' and therefore the idea of the differing roles of the three persons of the Trinity is seldom considered in his work.

⁵⁷ Gunton, 1997, xv.

⁵⁸ Gunton blames Augustine for this tendency, see Gunton, 1997, Ch 3.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how I have adopted Hunsinger's "single overriding conception" idea for investigating a theologian's work tempering it with biographical elements to emphasise that Aulén was a Swedish Lutheran theologian first and the author of a popular book on the atonement, second. Having analysed his own work, I then use theories rooted in recent NT studies (Stendahl and E.P. Sanders) and systematic theologies (Gunton) to give Aulén's interpretation of agape as "spontaneous, self-giving free and sovereign" deeper roots in the OT, as well as the NT, and ground his views in a distinctly Trinitarian perspective.

Chapter 3. Aulén's Swedish Ecclesiastical Context



3.1. Introduction

Gustaf Einar Hildebrand Aulén (1879–1977) lived for nearly one hundred years and as “the surrounding world changed fast... what happens in theology must be seen in light of the social, technical and political development”⁶⁰ that took place in Sweden during that time. His life can be divided into four key phases; i) early years and studies in Uppsala, 1877– 1913; ii) Lund professorship, 1913– 1933; iii) Bishop of Strängnäs, 1932– 1952; iv) retirement in Lund, 1952– 1977.⁶¹ My study will focus on three works published between 1927 and 1931 at the end of his time at Lund University. So, to better understand his setting, I going to focus in this chapter on his ecclesiastical context in the *Svenska Kyrka*.⁶²

3.2. The *Svenska Kyrka*

Aulén was son of a Frans Johan Aulén (1847–1904), a Swedish Lutheran priest, and this denomination was where Gustaf was born, lived, worked and died. It is known in Swedish with the definite article as *Svenska kyrkan*, literally “the Swedish Church”. This gives an indication of its’ dominant role as the sole interpreter of Christian faith in the country from the moment it arrived in Sweden at the Reformation when Gustaf Vasa (1496-1560) became king in June 1523. He was crowned in Strängnäs Cathedral, the very same church where

⁵⁹ Lund Domkyrka, 1927. Aulén probably attended this church during his student and professor years in Lund.

⁶⁰ Jeffner 1999, 136. My trans, “Omvärlden förändrades snabbt och... Den som händer i teologin måste sättas i samband med den sociala, tekniska och politiska utvecklingen”.

⁶¹ In his autobiography, Aulén divides his life into five periods, but I have put the first two together for this discussion. See Aulén, 1975, 5.

⁶² See the Appendix (§ 11.1.2) for my explanation of my use of Swedish words and grammar.

Aulén would become Bishop 410 years later. Almost immediately Vasa made moves to reject the incumbent Catholic faith. However, the process was gradual and it was only in 1593 that Lutheran Protestantism became the only official State religion and it remained in that unique position until 1876.

3.2.1. The *Svenska Kyrka* in Crisis, 1900

Aulén outlines three challenges that his denomination faced at the start of the 20th-century, “The intellectual critique... the religious based Church critique...[and] the growing labour movement [with its] Marxist philosophy”.⁶³

The first problem is well explained by Professor Emeritus at Uppsala University, Anders Jeffner (b. 1939) who divides the attack into three elements; i), biblical criticism, as represented by 19th-century German scholars Julius Wellhausen and Franz Delitzsch; ii) natural sciences, in particular Darwinism; iii) philosophy, such as the positivist thinking of Swedish philosopher, Axel Hägerström (1868–1939), who taught at Uppsala University from 1893 to 1933.⁶⁴ He was therefore working there when Aulén started his university studies in 1896. At that time liberalism was the dominant theological position of the State Church⁶⁵ and this had filtered down into popular presentations such as Viktor Rydberg’s influential book from 1862, *Bibelns Lära om Kristus*.⁶⁶ The admired author, whose poems are still read in Sweden today, relied on the latest German theological studies to reveal that the Bible taught neither the Trinity nor Christ’s divinity. So, when Aulén’s contemporary and the founder of Swedish Pentecostalism, Lewi Pethrus (1884–1974) read Rydberg as he studied at a Betel Baptist Seminary in Stockholm in 1904, he was thrown into a crisis of faith.⁶⁷

At the beginning of the 20th-century Pethrus and the Pentecostals represented the latest wave of a wider movement which had challenged the *Svenska Kyrka*’s religious hegemony since the middle of the 1800s. This movement was known as the *frikyrka*,⁶⁸ and started in

⁶³ Aulén, 1975, 32–33. My trans. “Den intellektuella kritiken... Den religiöst motiverade kyrkokritiken... den framväxande arbetarrörelsen [med sin] marxistisk filosofi”. Rasmusson also gives a similar list of challenges, but raises four points instead of three by separating Aulén’s intellectual challenge into the two points of liberalism and philosophy. So, according to him the challenges came from the “emerging free church movements, religious liberalism, the labor movement, and positivism” Rasmusson, 2007, 129. See also, Ewert, 2022, Online: <http://perewert.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/phd-ewert-vid-2022.pdf>. This PhD thesis considers, among other things, the Marxist leanings in the Social Democratic party, particularly before the 1960s.

⁶⁴ Jeffner, 1999, 137-9. He discusses his views in more depth on 145ff noting that his approach was like other European philosophers of that time, such as the British writer, Bertrand Russell.

⁶⁵ Berntson et al, 2012, 302.

⁶⁶ My trans., “The Bible’s Teaching on Christ”. In the bibliography this is listed as Rydberg, 1880.

⁶⁷ Josefsson, 2005, 174; Halldorf, 2017, 21.

⁶⁸ My trans. “the Free Church”, meaning “free” from the State control of doctrine, form, etc..

1848 when the first Baptist Church was formed in Sweden. Over the next half-century, a plethora of New Protestant denominations would be established under this catch-all title. Initially these were illegal, but by 1876, three years before Aulén was born, a Freedom of Religion act was passed leading to Methodism becoming the first official Christian religion aside from the Lutheran State Church.⁶⁹ However, this newfound religious freedom did not lead to a formal withdrawal from the State Church. For example, Pethrus made a conscious decision to retain his membership interpreting his movement as a renewal within the State Church.⁷⁰ However, membership and attendance were not the same thing. Aulén points out that church attendance was low and that the Lutheran Church faced serious difficulties as early as 1900.⁷¹ The newly formed and buoyant *frikyrka* had a clear identity and an active polemical discourse against the State Church, and it is this that Aulén is referring to when he wrote about the “religious based Church critique”, above. The result of this new movement was that for the first time in history, the *Svenska Kyrka* was forced to consider what it was *contra* other Protestant groupings.

The final concern, political pressure on the Church, was less acute in my research period, but became much more prominent in the second half of Aulén’s life when the Social Democratic party was in power from 1932 to 1976. This long period meant they were able to enact a huge social project called the *Folkhem*,⁷² which was based on socialist ideals tempered with political liberalism.⁷³ It included a huge range of changes in the relationship between State and Church setting in motion the disestablishment of the *Svenska Kyrka* which finally occurred in 2000.⁷⁴

3.2.2. The *Folkkyrka*

Even from within their own church, Aulén and his Lutheran contemporaries felt cornered. On the one hand, they were being taught by their lecturers to hold onto a dry Lutheran orthodoxy

⁶⁹ See Jervis, 2019, Online: <https://wordpress.com/post/abritonthinicehockeyblog.wordpress.com/4414>, n.p. for a longer treatment of Free Church history. At this stage the Freedom of Religion act gave people permission to join another one of the government’s recognised Christian religions, the first of which was Methodism. This differs from the later 1952 act which allow people to join any or no religion whatsoever.

⁷⁰ Solinger, 2012, Online: https://issuu.com/pingstsverige/docs/03_solinger_red_forsamlingssyn_ips_forapport, 38; Halldorf, 2017, 147.

⁷¹ Aulén, 1975, 33ff; Berntson et al, 2012, 301–4; Skogar, 1999, 17.

⁷² My trans., “the people’s house”.

⁷³ For an extended treatment of the development of the *Folkhem* see Ewert, 2022, Online: <http://perewert.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/phd-ewert-vid-2022.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Berntson et al, 2012, 326. This is the standard Swedish work on this era but other works also cover this hugely influential period such as Rasmusson, 2007 and Ewert, 2022, Online: <http://perewert.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/phd-ewert-vid-2022.pdf>.

which they felt was out of touch with the needs of an industrialising society.⁷⁵ On the other hand, large portions of the church hierarchy were infatuated by German liberalism, such as Harnack, who they felt were stuck in the last century.⁷⁶ Could they find a new position to help take the *Svenska Kyrka* into the 20th-century?

Whilst at Uppsala, Aulén was involved in the *Ungkyrkorörelse*,⁷⁷ a student group within the *Svenska Kyrka*, and his main contribution was composing the melody to the movement's romantic-nationalist theme song, *Fädernas kyrka*.⁷⁸ Here a new vision of being Church was born, which would become the dominant view within the denomination in the 20th-century. This new ecclesiology was called the *folkkyrka*.⁷⁹ It can be considered as a high Church ecclesiology and took inspiration from Sweden's own 1800s high Church movement and the British Anglo-Catholic movement.⁸⁰ Einar Billing (1871–1939) is usually considered as the first to give expression to its' theology when he was a lecturer in theology at Uppsala between 1901 and 1918. In contrast to the *frikyrka*'s exclusivist definitions of Church, the *folkkyrka* was inclusivist as everyone could be considered part of the *Svenska Kyrka* because Sweden was a Christian country. The *frikyrka* definitions were dependent on the faith of the individual believer, but Billing theologised that God himself is the founder of His Church and is at work in everyone, regardless of whether they are an 'active' or 'passive' member of the denomination by human definitions. He believed in the necessity of God's revelation of faith, but observed that it was the Church as a collective of people that was the bearer of this revelation, not just the single individual.⁸¹ The priest's role was to be active in the local community, not just the Church building, and preach God's forgiveness of sins to every member, i.e., the entire population. Swedish historical theologian, Björn Skogar (b. 1942)⁸² suggests that the view of Lundensian theologian, Anders Nygren (1890–1978) was even more high church orientated as for him the Church itself was the place where the forgiveness of

⁷⁵ Aulén specifically mentions Adolf Kolmodin, his lecturer in New Testament studies at Uppsala, as a purveyor of this old-fashioned view. Jonson, 2011, 35 *passim*; Aulén, 1975, 41 *passim*.

⁷⁶ Nygren criticises Harnack for his religious liberalism and individualism in a book from 1955, *Kristus och hans kyrka* which outlined his version of the *folkkyrka* - see Skogar, 1999, 23. Aulén states his criticism of Harnack, in Aulén, 1975, 81.

⁷⁷ My trans., "Young People's Church Movement".

⁷⁸ My trans., "The Fathers' Church". Note the wordplay on "Fathers" implying both the early Church Fathers, who were popular among the high churchman and a more nationalistic understanding as their literal Swedish "forefathers". For the Swedish text of the hymn, see Eklund, 1909, online: <http://www.bgf.nu/korrekt/psalm.html>

⁷⁹ My trans., "the people's church".

⁸⁰ Olofsson, 1999, 240; Berntson et al 2012, 321–22.

⁸¹ Jeffner, 1991, 151.

⁸² Skogar, 1999, 24. Sigurdson, 1996, 39 also discusses Billing's *folkkyrka* idea, but what is written here is largely taken from Skogar's longer explanation.

sins is experienced, not just through the preaching as Billing had emphasised. And it was Nygren's view which became dominant in the 1900s.

3.2.3. International Ecumenicalism

The 20th-century was also a time of increased globalisation and the *Svenska Kyrka*'s identity was therefore shaped, partly, through the new worldwide ecumenicalism that had been fostered by the denomination's archbishop, Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931), who had also supervised Aulén's doctoral thesis.⁸³ Swedish Church historians, Berntson *et al* suggests that this ecumenicalism did not foster improved relationships between the State and Free Churches in Sweden.⁸⁴ However, it did lead to the development of new global relationships, such as the Lutheran World Federation and Aulén was present when it was founded in Lund in 1947.⁸⁵ He was also active in the process which led to intercommunion between the Church of England and the Church of Sweden in 1922. So, it is no surprise that Anglicanism, and in particular, Anglo Catholicism, had a huge influence on the theology of Aulén and his contemporaries. He visited the United Kingdom fourteen times in his lifetime⁸⁶ and regularly received guests from the country.⁸⁷ Through these visits he would meet ordained Anglican monk, Arthur Gabriel Hebert, the man who would translate *CV* into English. In fact, it is arguable that this ongoing contact with global ecumenicalism, and Anglicanism in particular, is what turned this book from an isolated Swedish text into an international theological phenomenon which is still discussed over 90 years after it was published.

3.3. Aulén as a Lundensian Theologian

During his time as a professional academic in Lund, Aulén was a prominent member of what others would call the Lundensian School. He believed that this name was coined in 1925 when he and his colleagues started to print a journal, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*, which was published in that university town.⁸⁸ But this was never a conscious project and he did not like the idea of being part of collective movement. Instead, he preferred to see the differences, rather than the similarities, between himself and his colleagues.⁸⁹ However, he begrudgingly admits that Anders Nygren, Ragnar Bring (1895–1988), Gustaf Wingren and himself could be

⁸³ Aulén acknowledges his debt to Söderblom when it comes to ecumenicalism, e.g., Aulén, 1975, 73.

⁸⁴ Berntson et al, 2012, 323.

⁸⁵ Jonson, 2011, 338.

⁸⁶ Aulén, 1975, 203.

⁸⁷ Jonson, 2011, 341.

⁸⁸ Aulén, 1975, 101.

⁸⁹ Bexell, 1980, 106.

considered as the members of this School.⁹⁰ Arne Rasmusson, Professor in Systematic Theology at the University of Gothenburg, paints a portrait of the core principles of the Lundensian School, which I will summarise below.⁹¹

Academic circles in Sweden at the beginning of the 1900s were heavily influenced by rationalism and the view that all true research must be scientific. Theology was therefore suspect as neither rational nor scientific. The Lundensian School sought to challenge this by placing theology on a firm scientific basis and it was Nygren who was the architect of their way of thinking. At heart he was a philosopher and Kant was his source of inspiration. The 18th-century German helped to define the boundaries and possibilities of knowledge and in the process suggested that rational knowledge of the Divine is impossible. However, for Nygren this was not a problem because religion, when seen as a quest for the universal and eternal, was still a *logical necessity* in all human life.⁹² Christian systematic theology could therefore be defined as the study of “the eternal as it finds its solution in Jesus Christ”.⁹³ The essential task of systematic theology was the exploration of the key “driving and unifying force of a religion”,⁹⁴ or “motif” as Nygren called it. He believed this could be objective and thus it did not require the researcher to have faith.⁹⁵ As in Aulén, for Nygren the essential motif of the Christian faith was agape.⁹⁶ Rasmusson then draws out three elements which characterised Lundensian theology; i) the description of a genuine Christianity stripped of external influences; ii) Luther as the “unsurpassable”⁹⁷ interpreter of genuine Christianity; iii) Theology as an objective description which is not *per definition* normative.⁹⁸ He observes that the second point makes discussions of differing interpretations of Luther an extremely important part of their research,⁹⁹ a fact that be clearly seen in CV.¹⁰⁰

Skogar¹⁰¹ looks at the Lundensian School from another angle, observing that they created three boundaries which framed their work: i) They rejected liberal theology which they felt put humans and ethics in the centre;¹⁰² ii) As a result of the brutality of WW1, the

⁹⁰ Aulén, 1975, 89ff for his own take on Lund Theology.

⁹¹ Rasmusson, 2007, 132-135.

⁹² Jeffner, 1999, 157ff looks in detail and Nygren’s project. Sigurdson, 1996, 72-75 gives an overview of other aspects of Nygren’s work.

⁹³ Nygren in Rasmusson, 2007, 134.

⁹⁴ Rasmusson, 2007, 134.

⁹⁵ Jeffner, 160.

⁹⁶ Nygren in Jeffner, 161.

⁹⁷ Nygren in Rasmusson, 2007, 134.

⁹⁸ Also, Jeffner, 1999, 165.

⁹⁹ Rasmusson, 2007, 134.

¹⁰⁰ Aulén, 1930, especially chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁰¹ Skogar, 1999, 30-3.

¹⁰² Skogar, 1999, 30.

Lund theologians were philosophical realists tended to be sceptical about human nature in contrast to the idealists;¹⁰³ iii) Whilst the Lundensian School was against liberalism, it did not embrace the 1920s dialectical theology of Barth and Bultmann. If Barth emphasised the absolute necessity of Divine revelation, then the Lundensian theologians chose to see the Church as the place where Christian faith is to be discovered. Furthermore, the German speakers' conceptualisations assumed an absolute gap between God and humanity. But for the Swedes, this dissolved the possibility for a Church as a place where true "God-fellowship"¹⁰⁴ could occur.

Professor in Systematic Theology at the University of Gothenburg, Ola Sigurdson,¹⁰⁵ highlights that this interpretation of Barth, which is true to his earliest works but not his later ones, went unquestioned in Sweden and this may explain why Aulén was never enamoured with neo-orthodoxy despite similarities between their projects. These two giants of 20th-century systematic theology did meet face-to-face on two occasions through the global ecumenical movement.¹⁰⁶ But as Luther and Calvin were similar but different, so Lutheran Aulén and Reformed Barth never pursued a deeper friendship or collaboration.

3.4. Conclusion

It must be remembered that Aulén wrote the texts we are about to look at in Swedish to address issues pertaining to Swedish theology and the training of priests and the country's religious educators in the Swedish Lutheran faith. He had no idea that they would be later translated into English and that one of these books would become part of the global theological discussion. His context was dominated by the discussions of German theology as they applied to the Swedish context of the late 1920s and 1930s prior to the events that would precipitate WW2. At the same time, his work was written with a certain amount of self-confidence as the *folkkyrka* model became a reality bringing life back to local parishes and Lundensian theology was developing into a nationally recognised phenomenon.

¹⁰³ Skogar, 1999, 31. Jonson, 2011, Chapter 18 has a complete discussion of this issue and the Christian Humanist movement that rose in react to the Lundensian influence.

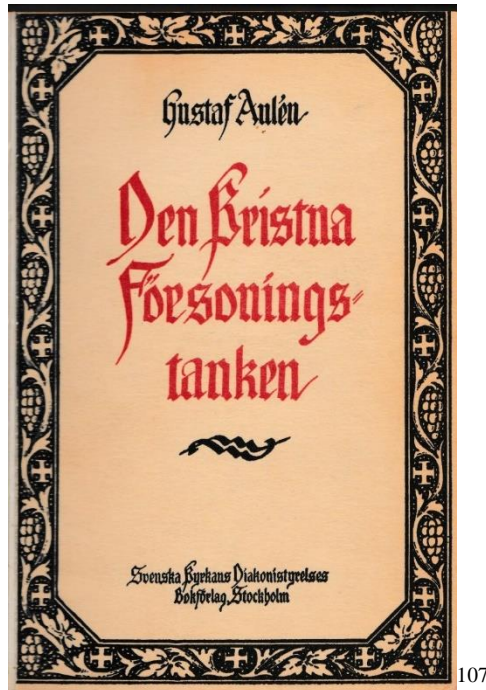
¹⁰⁴ Skogar, 1999, 31, my trans., "*gudsgemenskap*".

¹⁰⁵ Sigurdson, 1996, Chapter 2. This interpretation was started by Torsten Bohlin (see 40-50) and is influenced by his understanding of Kierkegaard. It was adopted by Aulén (see 66-71).

¹⁰⁶ Jonson, 2011, 240.

PART 2: AULÉN'S VIEW OF AGAPE LOVE

Chapter 4. Christus Victor



4.1. Introduction

The title of the book in Swedish is *Den kristna försönings tanken: Huvudtyper och brytningar*, literally “The Christian idea of reconciliation: main types and variations”.¹⁰⁸ But when translated into English by Hebert he gave it the title, *Christus Victor- an historical study of the three main types of the idea of the Atonement* explaining that he had taken the phrase “*Christus Victor*” from the German summary version of the text.¹⁰⁹ In his autobiography, Aulén affectionately describes the book as “my business card in the English speaking world” and says that he prefers Hebert’s title.¹¹⁰

I have written a brief overview of the content of *CV* and addressed the different threads of the discussions in secondary material in my earlier chapters. Therefore, now will follow a different approach than that of the straight forward descriptive method which will be used in the following two chapters on *DKG* and *DAKT*. Instead, my aim here is to consider two

¹⁰⁷ Book cover for Aulén, 1930.

¹⁰⁸ My own translation. Hebert translates it as “the Christian Idea of the Atonement”, Aulén, 1931b, xxvii.

¹⁰⁹ Aulén, 1931b, xxvii.

¹¹⁰ Aulén, 1975, 120. My trans. “mitt visitkort i den engelsktalande världen”.

aspects of his seminal work which are universally missed in discussions of Aulén's view of the atonement. The first is the oft neglected issue of the specific Swedish context into which Aulén gave his lectures in 1930 which became the book, *CV*. I will then look at my thesis' main theme, that of the love of God and show how it undergirds Aulén's classical theory of the atonement.

4.2. The Background

In September 1929, Aulén visited the terminally ill Söderblom, and the archbishop asked if he would give the annual Olaus Petri Lectures at Uppsala University in March and April 1930.¹¹¹ What no-one knew, least of all Aulén himself, that when these lectures become a book that it would become a contemporary theological classic. It is a perfect example of the theological method used by the Lundensian school as he seeks to highlight the genuine Christian tradition behind the facts of history, emphasises Luther's central role and attempts to presents the development of the doctrine of the atonement from a neutral, historical perspective.

4.3. The Wider Context: the *Försoningsstrid*

CV, like any other theological text, is written in a particular context. Whilst it was written prior to the outbreak of WW2, its success in the English-speaking world no doubt relates to the fact that Aulén posits a God who is continually against tyrannical powers of evil and was written by a theologian who was an activist against Hitler's Germany. The theme and his political engagement fit into the needs of the late 1930s and 1940s English speaking world in the same way that Barth and Bonhoeffer's life and theologies also reflect positive engagement with the challenges of that period of European history.

But if we locate the text in its' Swedish context, it is remarkable that Aulén does not mention the theological debate known as the *försoningsstrid*¹¹² which took place in the 1870s. It was a debate about the doctrine of the atonement, primarily over whether the objective or the subjective theory was the "right" Scriptural view of the cross. This debate was especially concerned over whether the atonement primarily enabled a change within God, such as turning away His wrath (the objective view), or a change within humanity, such as accepting His unmerited love (the subjective view) that makes it possible for a holy God to have fellowship with sinful humanity. Admittedly, the debate took place when Aulén was only a child and involved the evangelical part of Lutheranism, of which he was not a member. But

¹¹¹ Jonson, 2011, 107; Aulén, 1975, 119; Aulén, 1931b, xxi.

¹¹² The *Försoningsstrid*, which could be translated literally with the ironic title, "the battle of reconciliation".

one of the important protagonists was Paul Petter Waldenström (1832–1917)¹¹³ who completed his theological education in the *Svenska Kyrka* in 1864. However, he adopted the theology the New Evangelical Protestantism during his studies. So, he never practised as a Lutheran priest, preferring to work as a teacher whilst being active as a layman within the *Evangeliska Fosterlands Stifelsen* (EFS).¹¹⁴ This was the evangelical group within the Lutheran Church inspired by the revivals that swept through Sweden in the late 1800s giving birth to the *frikyrka* movement mentioned in the previous chapter.

EFS' founder, Carl Olof Rosenius (1816–1868), taught the objective theory of the atonement. When Rosenius died the editorial duties of the organisation's extremely popular and influential newspaper, *Pietisten*, was handed over to Waldenström. But in 1872, Waldenström changed his teaching and began to promote the subjective view of the atonement facilitating the beginning of the *försoningsstrid*. By 1876, he was forced to leave the EFS, but he took *Pietisten* with him and many left EFS and the *Svenska Kyrka* in 1878 to join Waldenström's newly formed Mission Covenant Church, which became the largest non-Lutheran denomination in Sweden until Swedish Pentecostalism took over that position in the mid-1950s.

At the same time disputes arose in the Baptist denomination, leading to the ejection of the controversial Helge Åkesson in 1872 for teaching, among other things, the subjective view of the atonement. They would formally create a small denomination, the Free Baptists, in 1894. So, the *försoningsstrid* had a huge impact in Swedish Christianity, creating two Free Church denominations, weakening the influence of EFS within the *Svenska Kyrka* and well as taking away attendees at many Lutheran churches' Sunday services in favour of the Mission Covenant Church groups.

Waldenström was no less voracious in his retirement and came to Uppsala to take part in debates on the atonement with Aulén and his professor, Einar Billing following the publication of the latter named's book on the subject.¹¹⁵ In 1912, when Waldenström was 80 years old, he came again to the university and Aulén was present during acrimonious debates which led to a split in the student group at Uppsala along a Lutheran-Free Church dividing line.¹¹⁶ 15 years later, in the book I will focus on in my next chapter, Aulén disparages

¹¹³ Formally, his name was Paul Petter Waldenström, but was known by his initials, P.P. Waldenström.

¹¹⁴ This difficult to translate phrase could literally be "The Evangelical Homeland Organisation" or more descriptively, the "Swedish Evangelical Mission Society".

¹¹⁵ Jonson, 2011, 107. Aulén mentions that he had talked to Billing in preparation for the lectures in the Preface of Aulén, 1930, 3.

¹¹⁶ P.P. Waldenström came to Uppsala University on 6 March 1912 and debated in favour of the Free Church over the State Church. Jonson, 2011, 61ff; Aulén, 1975, 76ff. In 1918 in Cambridge several evangelical students

Waldenström's view of salvation as "anthropocentric-eudemonistic" and "humanised".¹¹⁷ In CV he uses the same phraseology to talk about Schleiermacher's theology when discussing the subjective view of the atonement.¹¹⁸ So, in Aulén's mind these two disparate thinkers are very close to each other and neither represent his way of theologising.

It is possible that when he writes "The nineteenth century is characterised by a continuous conflict between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' views of the Atonement"¹¹⁹ his original hearers in Uppsala in 1930 - Swedish Lutheran priests and religious educators in training - would have understood that he was talking about the *försoningsstrid*. Given the Swedish theological context outlined above, it is therefore, impossible to read CV as simply a work of historical theology without at the same time seeing that he was critiquing current trends in Swedish Christianity. So, when he rallies against the objective theory of the atonement and "scholastic Protestantism", he is directly attacking the Lutheran orthodoxy of his time, including the EFS movement, views which would have been held by many of the priests-in-training in the room who would have been listening to his lecture. When he dismisses the subjective theory, he is speaking against the views held by the biggest Free Church denomination in the country, who may have also been represented in the lecture hall in Uppsala, albeit in smaller numbers. And from the previous chapter, we can note that with its' return to the early Church Fathers, Aulén's classical interpretation is typical of the high church romanticism which was prevalent in the *folkkyrka* movement. Of course, CV does not read like a Swedish 'in-house debate' about the atonement otherwise it would never have been accepted into the canon of classics of 20th C systematic theology. However, this background should not be ignored to fully understand the work.

4.4. The purpose of CV

Having placed the work more firmly in its Swedish setting, I can move on to considering the purpose of the work. Aulén claims it is meant to be a historical account, but despite his appeal to objectivity at the end of the book,¹²⁰ the polemic against Anselm's view is plain to see

confirmed their decision to leave the Student Christian Movement at the university because of the latter's views on penal substitutionary theory of the atonement. See Stott, 1986, 8-9.

¹¹⁷ Aulén, 1927, 332. My trans. "antropocentiskt- eudemonistiska" and "humaniserade". He also uses the double name, "antropocentiskt- eudemonistiska" to describe the characteristic feature of Enlightenment theology, Aulén, 1927, 297. That this attack was directed against P.P. Waldenström can be missed as his name only appears in a footnote.

¹¹⁸ Aulén, 1931b, 136; Aulén, 1930, 227.

¹¹⁹ Aulén, 1931b, 135; Aulén 1930, 227, "skildring av försoningstankens historia under 1800-talet... karakteriseras i första hand... av bryningar mellan den »subjektiva» och »objektiva» typen".

¹²⁰ Aulén, 1931b, 158-9; Aulén, 1930, 266-8.

throughout the text. In his biography, written 45 years later, he is much clearer that there was a distinct agenda behind the book and he calls it “declaration of war”, a “plaidoyer” and “very pointed” against the Lutheran orthodoxy of his time.¹²¹ However, what is much less obvious is that Aulén has a distinct idea about God and the Christian faith which is the motivating factor behind his emphasis of the classic idea of the atonement.

4.4.1. Divine Love as the Cause of the Atonement

As early as the preface of my English edition of CV, Aulén mentions that recapturing the true picture-of-God as the God of Love was one of his aims in writing the book.¹²² And on closer a reading, God’s love is mentioned in every single chapter of the work except Chapter V on Anselm’s theory. Below I will consider what he says about God’s love to show how comprehensively this topic dominates his analysis.

4.4.2. Irenaeus

As Aulén summarises his look at Irenaeus’ work, he interprets the early Church Father’s emphasis on Christ’s victory over tyrannical forces as an expression of agape, saying that “It is God’s Love, the Divine Agape, that removes the sentence that rested upon mankind, and creates a new relation which is altogether different from any sort of justification by legal righteousness. This whole dispensation is the work of grace”.¹²³

4.4.3. Augustine

When discussing Augustine, Aulén approves of his idea that it is Divine Love that is the origin of the plan to save sinful humanity. This Love chooses to not displace the devil by absolute sovereign force, but rather, remove satan through the way of love by becoming man in the Incarnation. Therefore, Divine Love demonstrates itself in action by His “coming into fellowship with us”¹²⁴ taking on our suffering and “delivering us from wrath”.¹²⁵ That said, Aulén is also critical of the Latin Church Father, he suggests that his idea of God’s Love has been too heavily influenced by the *Eros* view that is a remnant of his time as a

¹²¹ Aulén, 1975, 221-2. The Swedish words I have translated in this sentence are “stridsskrift” (221), “plaidoyer” (222) and “starkt tillspetsad” (221-2).

¹²² Aulén, 1931b, x.

¹²³ Aulén, 1931b, 34; Aulén, 1930, 68, “Det finnes ingen annan motivering för det som sker än den gudomliga agape allena. Det är denna som bryter igenom den dom, som vilar över mänskligheten, och som därmed skapar ett annat förhållande mellan Gud och värld än det som vilar på rättsordningen grund. Allt stämmer från och är ett uttryck av Guds nåd”.

¹²⁴ Aulén, 1931b, 45; Aulén, 1930, 85 “inträdde i vår gemenskap”.

¹²⁵ Aulén, 1931b, 45; Aulén, 1930, 85 “räddade från vreden”.

Neoplatonist.¹²⁶ In Aulén this is a “weakness”¹²⁷ that ultimately does not take him away from “the classic type”¹²⁸ of atonement theory.

4.4.4. Paul

When considering the Biblical data in Chapter IV, Aulén plays Saint Paul against the emphasis that he finds in Anselm. So, whereas in the medieval theologian the atonement is driven by the concept of justice, in the Apostle it is the “Divine Love itself that is making redemption”.¹²⁹ In Paul’s teaching Aulén sees an example of the radical change in relationship with God that is representative of the differences between the Old and New Covenants. The former is dominated by the legal relationship, whereas the apostolic witness reflects “that sovereign Divine Love has taken the initiative, broken through the order of justice and merit, triumphed over the powers of evil, and created a new relation between the world and God”.¹³⁰

4.4.5. Luther

This dovetails nicely into the next explicit mention of the Love of God in CV, which occurs as Aulén discusses Luther’s theology. He observes that the reformer saw the Law as both good and evil and that it had become a “tyrant”.¹³¹ This despot demands obedience in both action and will placing humanity in an impossible situation that can only be broken by a new system - that of Divine Love creating a new order of grace that is inaugurated by Christ’s victory over the Law (and other tyrants) at the Cross.

Luther’s understanding of Divine Love’s relationship to the cross is again examined when Aulén looks at the German’s view of the wrath of God. Despite the difficulties it raises, Luther sees this wrath as both the will of God and another tyrant that stands against humanity

¹²⁶ Aulén, 1931b, 40; Aulén, 1930, 76. In the Swedish edition of the text Aulén makes a footnote to a paper by Anders Nygren on Augustine’s view of love from 1929 before the publication of *Eros och Agape*. Gotthard Nygren notes that Aulén has changed his polemic against Augustine from his earlier work. See Gotthard Nygren, 1960, 341. Anders Nygren sees Augustine’s dependence on Neoplatonism as a much bigger problem than it is for Aulén (See Nygren, 1953, 471; Nygren, 1936, 276). Gunton, 1997, 51 affirms Anders Nygren’s general premise that Augustine was heavily influenced by his Neoplatonism but does not accept every detail of the Swede’s analysis.

¹²⁷ Aulén, 1930, 76. My trans. “svaghet”. Hebert adds an interpretative gloss in his translation of the word as “fail most completely”, Aulén, 1931b, 40.

¹²⁸ Aulén, 1931b, 40; Aulén, 1930, 77, “den klassiska linjen”.

¹²⁹ Aulén, 1931b, 72. This sentence does not appear in the original Swedish version. That the God of love is the cause of reconciliation only appears in a footnote in a quote from Schmitz, which appears in both the English version and the Swedish one, Aulén, 1930, 129.

¹³⁰ Aulén, 1931b, 79; Hebert has been not been literal in his translation of this sentence which in Swedish reads, “Försoningen är ett uttryck för, en handling av den suveräna och spontana gudomliga kärlek, som bryter igenom rättsordningens ram och i kamp mot seger över de gudsfientliga makterna skapar ett nytt förhållande mellan sig och världen” Aulén, 1930, 139.

¹³¹ Aulén, 1931b, 112; Hebert is again quite free in his translation here of “en ond makt, en fördärvmakt” Aulén, 1930, 191.

and it is “opposed to Divine Love”.¹³² But ultimately the “Divine blessing, the Love”¹³³ wins out as it represents God’s “inmost nature”.¹³⁴ In comparison to Anselm’s theory, Aulén believes that in Luther we can see a genuine defeat of wrath by the Divine Love. In the objective theory all we have is a “rationally conceived compromise”¹³⁵ between punishment and remission of the penalty from the human side alone.

4.4.6. Scholastic Protestantism

Divine Love is again under discussion when Aulén talks about scholastic Protestantism’s view of the atonement in Chapter VII. He observes that in this theology obedience to the Law is brought back, but this time in the notion that Christ’s whole life must be an obedience to the Law for satisfaction to be wrought.¹³⁶ In this way Christ’s work is dominated by the justice theme and only secondarily is Divine Love in action.

4.4.7. Enlightenment Theology

Aulén spots a similar problem in the subjective theory of the atonement as put forward by Schleiermacher and others from the Enlightenment onwards. Christ’s sacrificial death is our example making it possible that “charity is stirred up in our hearts”.¹³⁷ But for Aulén, Pelagianism stands at the door and here salvation is no longer a work of God’s “free, spontaneous love”¹³⁸ but based on the worthiness of man. So, in the subjective view of the atonement love is no longer Divine but has become “humanised” and loses its radical opposition to evil.¹³⁹

4.5. Conclusion

CV is rightly understood as a great work of historical theology. But there is also another, more important theme at work, the love of God. At every stage in his argument in this book Aulén reverts to the ultimate reason for the atoning work of Christ, God’s free and spontaneous Divine Love. Agape is the driving force behind Irenaeus’ statement of the classical theory, Augustine’s view of the incarnation, the Apostle Paul’s approach to the atonement and

¹³² Aulén, 1931b, 114; Aulén, 1930 193, “den gudomliga kärleken skilt”

¹³³ Aulén, 1931b, 114; Aulén, 1930, 194, “den gudomliga ‘välsignelsen’ - kärleken”.

¹³⁴ Aulén, 1931b, 114; Aulén, 1930, 194, “det s.a.s. innerst gudomliga”.

¹³⁵ Aulén, 1931b, 115; Aulén, 1930, 194, “en rationellt gångbar mellanväg”.

¹³⁶ Aulén, 1931b, 129; Aulén, 1930, 217.

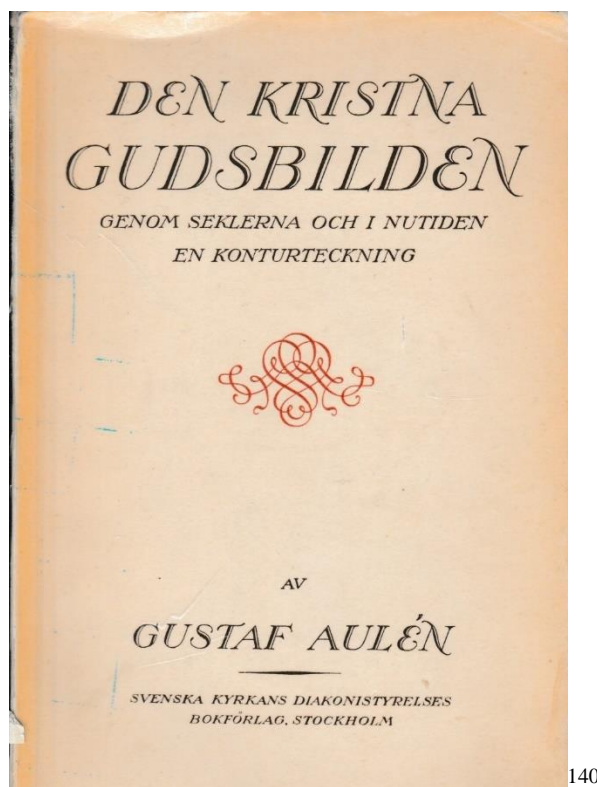
¹³⁷ Schleiermacher in Aulén, 1931b,139. This reference appears in a discussion on Rashdall’s *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology: Being the Bampton Lectures for 1915* which does not appear in the original Swedish text from 1930.

¹³⁸ Aulén, 1931b, 139. Not in original 1930 text.

¹³⁹ Aulén, 1931b, 154; Aulén, 1930, 264.

Luther's opposition to the Law and his resolution of the problem of the wrath of God. In the final sections of the book, it is scholastic Protestantism and Enlightenment theology's diminishing of the Love of God which renders them inadequate in comparison to dramatic view of the atonement where the Divine Love defeats the tyrants that have held humanity in bondage since the Fall. Simply put, without Agape there is no classical view of the atonement in Aulén's mind.

Chapter 5. The Christian Picture-of-God



5.1. Introduction

The first edition of *DKG* was published in 1927 when Aulén was forty-eight years old. It has only ever appeared in Swedish and although written three years before *CV*, the same views on atonement can be seen here too.¹⁴¹

In the 1950s Aulén received a request from his American publisher to translate this book into English. But in his autobiography, Aulén gives three reasons why he refused this; i) because he was not satisfied with the part on the Biblical basis of his work; ii) that the contemporary theology section was now extremely dated because of the rapid changes in theology; But, as we observed in discussing his *lex creationis*, the main reason he says is iii) his view of the place of the Law had changed in the intervening period.¹⁴²

5.1.1. The word *gudsbild*

¹⁴⁰ Book cover for Aulén, 1927.

¹⁴¹ For example, Aulén, 1927, 213 where he suggests that Luther broke with the juridical view of the atonement which had dominated since Tertullian.

¹⁴² Aulén, 1975, 221.

My own translation of the title of the book would be, “*The Christian picture-of-God through the centuries and now – an outline*”. But immediately, we meet the problem in translation of the Swedish compound word “*gudsbilden*”, or “the *gudsbild*” which brings together the words *Gud*- and *-bild*. Whilst *Gud* is easily translated as ‘God’, the word *bild* is more problematic. In 1970 Linton used the phrase “Image of God” to translate *gudsbild*.¹⁴³ Whilst an accurate translation, I would prefer to avoid this phrase because it has become associated with a whole approach to theological anthropology using the Latin phrase, *imago dei*.¹⁴⁴ In 1943 Wahlström and Arden used “conception of God” to translate the word *gudsbild*.¹⁴⁵ The main problem with this is that “conception” implies a mental process whereas Aulén’s metaphor implies a “seeing”. He is also sceptical to an over rationalised approach to the topic and states that he wants to use *gudsbild* as against the more philosophically orientated compound word, *gudsbegrepp*,¹⁴⁶ where *begrepp* could be translated as “conception”. So, a better translation is the more literal “picture-of-God”¹⁴⁷ or “view-of-God” which I have used synonymously with the word *gudsbild* throughout this paper.

5.2. The Content of *DKG*

Aulén’s discussion is heavily orientated around the debates of 18th-century and 19th-century German thought and when it comes to interpretations of historical theology, no one looms larger than Adolf von Harnack, whose enormous work *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* towers over Aulén.¹⁴⁸ But the Swede wants to suggest that his view of dogmatic history as dominated by Christology is misplaced.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, Aulén senses that a change is in the air, not just precipitated by “the global crisis”¹⁵⁰ but also already in evidence in industrialising Sweden since the turn of the century.¹⁵¹ In theology these changes reflect a move away from

¹⁴³ Aulén, 1970.

¹⁴⁴ e.g., Gunton, 1997, Ch 6 or Stendahl, 1990, 12ff.

¹⁴⁵ Aulén, 1954.

¹⁴⁶ Aulén, 1927, 8.

¹⁴⁷ This translation is used by Philip Watson, the English Methodist who studied under Aulén in the 1930s. See, for example, Watson, 1947, 190.

¹⁴⁸ Adolf von Harnack (1851– 1930) was a German Lutheran theologian and the work was translated into English in 1901 with the title, *History of Dogma*.

¹⁴⁹ Aulén, 1927, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Aulén, 1927, 347. My trans. “den allmänna världskrisen”. It is unclear exactly what Aulén means here but he could be referring to WW1 and its aftermath. However, note that this was written before the Wall Street Crash and the start of the Great Depression in 1929.

¹⁵¹ Aulén, 1927, 347–8.

the previous centuries' dominant themes of "anthropocentricity", "monism", the "material world" and "individualism".¹⁵²

With this introduction done, I will now present the teachings from the first Book of *DKG*, which comprises three Chapters which discuss an essential part of Aulén's theological worldview – his own *gudsbild* – and how he constructs it from the Biblical narrative.

5.3. The Essential Motif of the Christian Faith¹⁵³

5.3.1. Early Christianity's Dividing Lines¹⁵⁴

Aulén starts by looking for the essential motif of the Christian faith, that which makes it unique in comparison to the Jewish and Hellenistic milieus in which it grew. This is not an attempt to deny the continuity between the OT and NT, or to deny the influence of Greek thought into the Gospels and Letters. Rather, it is a search for the unique contribution of Christian theology. He suggests there have been three ways to interpret this question;

- i) Lutheran scholastic orthodoxy. Based on the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, this flattens out the differences between the Testaments by saying that God has not changed His revelation in any aspects over time;¹⁵⁵
- ii) Enlightenment theology. This says that there is the difference between the early Christian teachings and the later post-biblical teachings of the Church.¹⁵⁶ The former promotes a continuity with the OT, seeing God in monotheistic terms and interpreting the "simple teachings of Jesus"¹⁵⁷ as an extension of the prophetic tradition. With time this was corrupted by Hellenistic influences. Rydberg's book is cited as the classic Swedish example of this;¹⁵⁸
- iii) The third is a newer type of division, which promotes that the dividing line is in the NT itself, with Paul considered as the creator of Christian faith's novel ideas around Christology and the Trinity.¹⁵⁹

Whereas (i) sees *no* dividing line in terms of what is a distinctive Christian *gudsbild*, (ii) places that line *after* the NT was written, whilst (iii) puts it *in* the NT between Paul and synoptics. Aulén's proposal, however, is to create a dividing line *between the two Testaments*

¹⁵² Aulén, 1927, 344. My trans. "antropocentriciteten", "monistiska", "inomvärldsliga" and "individualistiska" respectively.

¹⁵³ Aulén, 1927, 13. My trans. "Det kristna grundmotivet". Aulén divides up his work in Book, Chapter, Subheading.

¹⁵⁴ Aulén, 1927, 13. My trans. "Urkristendomens gränslinjer".

¹⁵⁵ Aulén, 1927, 14.

¹⁵⁶ Aulén, 1927, 16.

¹⁵⁷ Aulén, 1927, 16. My trans. "Jesu enkla lära".

¹⁵⁸ Aulén, 1927, 17.

¹⁵⁹ Aulén, 1927, 18.

because he believes that the biggest difference in the picture-of-God is shown in a comparison of OT Judaism and Jesus Himself.¹⁶⁰

5.3.2. The Gospels' picture-of-God¹⁶¹

5.3.2.1. The Essential motif of Christianity¹⁶²

Aulén is clear that he believes in the continuity between the Testaments as Jesus' God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob who is the Holy One, lord, creator and judge.¹⁶³ But in the NT we see a totally different view of God as one of love in contrast with "the legal system of religion"¹⁶⁴ in the OT. He places an enormous amount of stress on the radical novelty of this new view-of-God. In comparison to Judaism, it is not just that Christianity talks more about Divine Love on a quantitative basis, but rather what we are looking at is: "a whole new vision",¹⁶⁵ a "revolution"¹⁶⁶ and "the most remarkable change you can imagine".¹⁶⁷ Luther also understood this difference as "the most radical transformation".¹⁶⁸

The Jewish system was based on the Law, and whilst mercy and grace are present, they are given as rewards to those who are righteous and pious.¹⁶⁹ God, of course, may be generous with his mercy and give more than strictly is required in the situation, an idea that he also finds in Aquinas.¹⁷⁰

By contrast, the view-of-God we see in the Gospels is completely different and its very nature is to take the initiative and to give. He will later ascribe the same words to Luther's view,¹⁷¹ but it is here that we find Aulén's own definition of God's Agape Love as "**spontaneously giving, free and sovereign**".¹⁷² "Spontaneous" here means 'not forced', 'non-contingent' or 'unmotivated' rather than 'unplanned'. His definition is not dissimilar

¹⁶⁰ Aulén, 1927, 20.

¹⁶¹ Aulén, 1927, 20. My trans. "Evangeliets gudsbild".

¹⁶² Aulén, 1927, 20. My trans. "Det kristna gudsmotivet".

¹⁶³ Aulén, 1927, 20–21. My trans. "Jesu Gud är enligt evangeliet »Abrahams, Isaks och Jakobs Gud». Han är den Helige, himmelens och jordens herre, skaparen och domaren". I have followed Aulén's Swedish in not capitalising these titles.

¹⁶⁴ Aulén, 1927, 25. My trans. "rättsordningens religiositet". Note again, that in discussing Luther that exactly the same phraseology is used. See, Aulén, 1927, 205.

¹⁶⁵ Aulén, 1927, 25. My trans. "en helt ny syn".

¹⁶⁶ Aulén, 1927, 25.

¹⁶⁷ Aulén, 1927, 26. My trans. "om det mest markerade genombrott som tänkas kan".

¹⁶⁸ Aulén, 1927, 178. My trans. "den mest radikala förvandling".

¹⁶⁹ Aulén, 1927, 26. Aulén quotes Psalm 103:17-18 and on the following page he cites 2 Esdras 8:34 as quintessential expressions of this legalistic faith. Anders Nygren also quotes Ps 103. See Nygren, 1953, 45; Nygren, 1930, 71.

¹⁷⁰ Aulén, 1927, 26–27.

¹⁷¹ Aulén, 1927, 186–7, where Aulén writes "Det är icke rättsordningen, som ger uttryck åt Guds innersta väsen, utan den spontant givande, fria, suveräna kärlek, som ger därför att det är dess natur att giva".

¹⁷² Emphasis mine. Aulén, 1927, 28. My trans. "den spontant givande, fria och suveräna kärlek".

from Lund colleague, Anders Nygren, who would write four years later that agape is “spontaneous and “unmotivated””; “indifferent to value”; “creative”; and, “Initiator of Fellowship with God” in his celebrated work, *Eros och Agape*.¹⁷³

So, Jesus’ conflict with the Judaism of his day was ultimately around this understanding of the character of God.¹⁷⁴ Jesus was tampering with the “central nervous system”¹⁷⁵ of the Jewish way of thinking which is why he met such a strong reaction as he was destroying the moral code as they understood it.¹⁷⁶

5.3.2.2. The Background to the Gospels picture-of-God: dualism and eschatology¹⁷⁷

Aulén realises that the NT was not written into a cultural-religious vacuum and want to underline two aspects of its authors’ worldview which he thinks have an important bearing on the essence of Christianity. These are dualism and eschatology, although he gives over twice as much space to the first theme.¹⁷⁸

He sees that in 19th-century theology dualism has got a bad press because of its association with demonology and other mythological elements.¹⁷⁹ But, this does not automatically mean it should be dismissed and Aulén highlights that the intertestamental period includes a range of material which is much more dualistic in its worldview than the biblical prophets.¹⁸⁰ Looking at several Gospel stories, he builds a case to say that the background story of the NT is a dramatic fight between good and evil.¹⁸¹

For Aulén this dualism presents a problem regarding the subject of God’s authority. The Scriptures point to a clear belief in the sovereignty of God but at the same time express the reality of evil. A repeated theme in Aulén’s entire oeuvre is his very negative attitude to attempting to solve this tension, a behaviour that he labels with the derogatory term, “rationalism”. So, when Aulén’s Swiss contemporary, Paul Wernle (1872–1939) attempts to try to extrapolate a monistic theodicy so that God ultimately “stands behind”¹⁸² evil acts such as the fall of the Tower of Siloam, this is rationalism which goes beyond what the text

¹⁷³ Nygren’s fourfold definition of agape comes from headings in Nygren, 1953, 75-81; Nygren, 1930, 49-51.

¹⁷⁴ Aulén, 1927, 28.

¹⁷⁵ Aulén, 1927, 28. My trans. “livsnerv”.

¹⁷⁶ Aulén, 1927, 29.

¹⁷⁷ Aulén, 1927, 31. My trans. “Den evangeliska gudsbildens bakgrund: dualism och eskatologi”.

¹⁷⁸ It may be noted that both ideas appear in contrast to the prevailing German theology. Dualism replaces the monism of Schleiermacher, Aulén, 1927, 315; eschatology replaces the ‘this worldly’ theology of Ritschl, Aulén, 1927, 322.

¹⁷⁹ Aulén, 1927, 31.

¹⁸⁰ Aulén, 1927, 32.

¹⁸¹ Aulén, 1927, 33. A key theme of CV.

¹⁸² Aulén, 1927, 34. My trans. “står bakom”.

literally says. For Aulén, evil and God must remain two independent categories and no further explanation is given to us, other than God's ultimate defeat of Satan.

When it comes to eschatology, Aulén leans on the most recent research of German NT scholars Johannes Weiss (1863–1914) and Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) concluding that the Kingdom of God is “at work in the present”¹⁸³ but has not yet been completely revealed in its fullness. The faith of the early church that we can see, for example, in Paul, is “in this life a never-ending tension between this which is and that which is not yet”.¹⁸⁴ Unfortunately, Aulén does not give much space to this interesting view which would later be called ‘inaugurated eschatology’.¹⁸⁵

5.3.3. The Apostolic Preaching¹⁸⁶

5.3.3.1. The Questions¹⁸⁷

Aulén suggests that in Paul's preaching we find exactly the view-of-God that we see in the Gospels when it comes to the radical contrast between the two covenants. He does not deny the differences between the Gospels and the Pauline letters, for example, with his use of phrases such as ‘righteous’ and ‘reconciliation’, but for Aulén, in the end the *gudsbild* is the same. Hellenization is often blamed as the foreign impulse that led the early Christians away from the simple monotheistic faith in God from the OT to a Christ cult.¹⁸⁸ But Aulén believes that critics have made too much of the differences between the NT texts and the later Church formulations. That is not to deny that there is a difference or that Greek philosophy has played a part. But Christology is clearly part of the apostolic deposit and Christ is already “the central point of piety and the cult”.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, when we meet Christocentric teaching in the NT, theocentricity is still present, by which he means that Jesus is presented in relation to another, “God”.¹⁹⁰ Here we can see Aulén's preference to use the name “God” when he means the “Father” as well as his suggestion that the NT contains a *gudsbild* which varies from “the pure monotheistic faith-in-God” from the OT,¹⁹¹ topics which I will return to later when I discuss the Trinity in Aulén's theology.

¹⁸³ Aulén, 1927, 36. My trans. “verksam i det närvarande”.

¹⁸⁴ Aulén, 1927, 55. My trans. “en under jordelivets villkor aldrig upphörande spänning mellan det som är och det som ännu icke är”.

¹⁸⁵ e.g., Ladd, 1974.

¹⁸⁶ Aulén, 1927, 37. My trans. “Den Apostoliska Förkunnelsen”.

¹⁸⁷ Aulén, 1927, 37. My trans. “Frågeställning”.

¹⁸⁸ Aulén, 1927, 41.

¹⁸⁹ Aulén, 1927, 41. My trans. “fromhetens och kultens mittpunkt”.

¹⁹⁰ Aulén, 1927, 42. My trans. “Gud”.

¹⁹¹ Aulén, 1927, 42 and 43. My trans. “den rena monoteistiska gudstron”.

5.3.3.2. The Cross¹⁹²

Next Aulén discusses Paul's view of the Cross, the place where God's will is revealed and we come to the centre of the revelation of God's heart of love. Aulén goes as far as to say that like John, Paul could have been called the "apostle of love".¹⁹³ He believes that for Paul and the other apostles' it is their interpretation of the life and work of Jesus that has determined their *gudsbild*. So, 'God's love' is not a general statement but mean specifically, "the love of God that is in Christ"¹⁹⁴ and this love is shown supremely at the Cross. Aulén writes:

The cross has something to say, not just about Christ but also as much about God himself: it says that the Divine Love is a love that gives of itself, that goes the way of sacrifice. It is this fact that reveals its' bottomless depth and sovereign power. The Divine Love has been branded with the mark of the cross.¹⁹⁵

If love is the centre of Pauline thought, then we can also see Aulén's other point, that this was a total rejection of "legal system of religion"¹⁹⁶ which is made clear across the NT, for example, in John the Evangelist's opening chapter, "for the law came through Moses but grace and peace through Jesus Christ".¹⁹⁷

5.3.3.3. The Lord – The Spirit¹⁹⁸

In the final section of this chapter, Aulén leans heavily on the work of German NT theologian Adolf Deissmann (1866–1937) who interprets the centre of Paul's thought as "in Christ" mysticism. (We may also observe that almost all the themes discussed in this subsection also appear in Aulén's discussion of Luther).¹⁹⁹ Aulén is not at all keen on the phrase mysticism and prefers to use the compound word "Christ-fellowship"²⁰⁰ and wants to link this idea to the Spirit's work of adoption. Paul may have had an eschatological worldview, but that does not stop this fellowship-in-Christ expressing itself in action in the now, not least, in the fruits of the Spirit.²⁰¹ So, as he analyses Paul's view-of-God, he finds a clear link between Christ and the Spirit. Therefore, if Paul viewed Christ as Divine so too must the Spirit be Divine as

¹⁹² Aulén, 1927, 44. My trans. "Korset".

¹⁹³ Aulén, 1927, 44. My trans. "»kärlekens apostel»". Aulén quotes 2 Cor 13.1; 2 Cor 1.3; Rm 8:35, 2 Cor 13.13 from SV1917 in this section.

¹⁹⁴ Rm 8:39, Aulén, 1927, 45. My trans. "Guds kärlek i Kristus". All English language Bible quotations are from the New International Version – UK, unless stated.

¹⁹⁵ Aulén, 1927, 45. My trans. "Korset har nämligen något att förtälja icke bara om Kristus utan lika mycket om Gud själv: det säger, att den gudomliga kärleken är en kärlek, som ger sig själv ut, som går offrets väg. Det är detta faktum, som avslöjar både dess bottenlösa djup och dess suveräna makt. Den gudomliga kärleken blir s.a.s. stämplad med korsets märke".

¹⁹⁶ Aulén, 1927, 47. My trans. "rättsordningens religiositet".

¹⁹⁷ Jn 1:17 in Aulén, 1927, 47.

¹⁹⁸ Aulén, 1927, 49. My trans. "Herren-Anden".

¹⁹⁹ See the section headed, "Gudsgemenskapen", Aulén, 1927, 234-240.

²⁰⁰ Aulén, 1927, 51. My trans. "Kristusgemenskap".

²⁰¹ Aulén, 1927, 52. Aulén does not use the phrase "fruits of the Spirit" but instead quotes several of them.

well.²⁰² This God-fellowship can also be called by the traditional theological term, immanence.²⁰³ Aulén finishes off this chapter by suggesting that whilst Barth emphasised the distance between God and humanity in his theology, Aulén sees that in the earliest church witness there is both immanence and transcendence alongside a dualism of the now-and-not-yet and an eschatological hope.²⁰⁴

5.4. Summary

The opening book of Aulén's *DKG* attempts to lay the foundation of the Christian view-of-God that he will go on to analyse in the following seven books of Church history. He uses the phrase *gudsbild* because he wants to avoid either philosophical or doctrinal analyses. The distinctive Christian *gudsbild* can be found at the crossroads of the two Testaments, not by looking at Jesus' teachings in comparison to the later Church or by considering the difference between Jesus and Paul. Whilst there is continuity in the views of God in the Old and New Testaments, Aulén wants to highlight a seismic difference – that the New Covenant promotes a God of love in contrast to the legally orientated system of the Old. In this legal system God's blessings are given to the righteous and the pious, those who have earned those benefits. By contrast the God of love is marked by the "spontaneously giving, free and sovereign love". Jesus' death is partly due to him promoting a radically different view of God than was acceptable in his milieu.

Aulén wants his readers to be aware that this view-of-God is rooted in a dualistic and eschatological worldview which can be seen in the Gospels because the narrative plays out against the backdrop of a fight between good and evil. Whilst there are victories that may be experienced in the present, the fullness of the Kingdom is still to come.

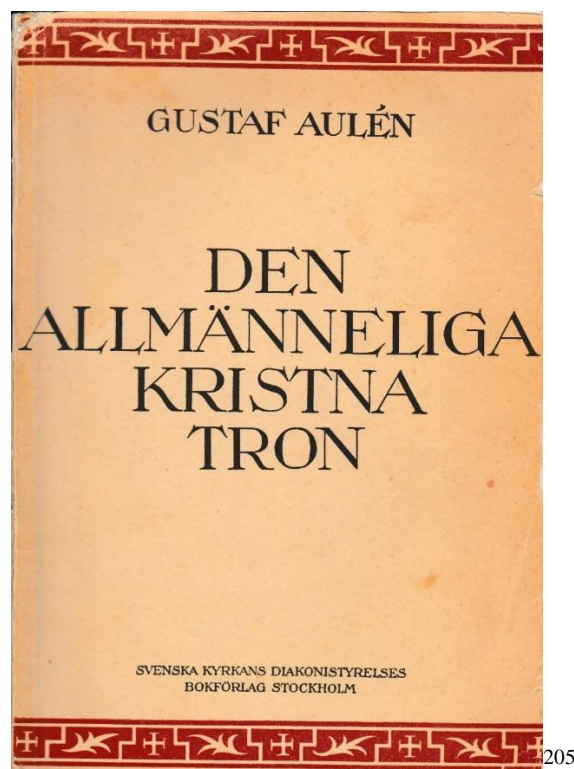
Aulén does see clear differences in Paul's writings compared to the Gospels but, ultimately, finds the same *gudsbild* in his Letters where the apostle expresses his faith in a God of love and a rejection of the legalism of Second Temple Judaism. Aulén is not deterred by Paul's Christocentrism or his accentuation on the Holy Spirit, arguing that these are giving shape to his *gudsbild*. It is specifically Jesus' death on the cross that reveals on a detailed level the meaning of the Divine Love as self-giving, sovereign power. The Holy Spirit makes fellowship with the risen Christ possible, but our experiences now must be held in the eschatological tension between current ownership and future hope.

²⁰² Aulén, 1927, 53.

²⁰³ Aulén, 1927, 54. My trans. "immanens".

²⁰⁴ Aulén, 1927, 55.

Chapter 6. The Faith of the Christian Church



6.1. Introduction

DAKT appeared in Swedish in six editions and was translated into five different languages.²⁰⁶ I will only be considering the third Swedish edition of *DAKT* from 1931 to keep our study of Aulén's works within a small window of time at the end of his professorship in Lund.

The Swedish word *allmännelig* in the title of this book is used in the Apostles' Creed to describe the Church as "catholic" so the English title, the "*Faith of the Christian Church*" well expresses the meaning of Aulén's name for the work.²⁰⁷ He says that the task of systematic theology is to explain the Christian faith as it is in the present now, in contrast to historical theology which follows the development of a doctrine in a particular period of the past.²⁰⁸ He feels it is important to not write about one's own individual understanding of the faith, nor that of a particular denomination, but rather to try to express the essential elements

²⁰⁵ Book cover, Aulén, 1931a.

²⁰⁶ 1923, 1924, 1931, 1943, 1957 and 1965. Aulén 1975, 288.

²⁰⁷ See Aulén, 1954.

²⁰⁸ Aulén, 1931a, 3.

of the Christian faith as a living whole.²⁰⁹ It is interesting to note that he states that his audience in the first instance is “interested laity”.²¹⁰

The book is divided up into four parts; a prolegomenon, *Faith and Theology*,²¹¹ and then three further sections. In the third Swedish edition the centrality of love in Aulén’s thought is clearly seen in the titles of these sections: *I The Divine Love; II The Divine Love’s Way; III The Divine Love’s Community*.²¹² I will now look at the part of *DAKT* which is labelled I.A., §13–18 using the section titles that Aulén uses himself.

6.2. The Christian Picture-of-God²¹³

6.2.1. Holiness²¹⁴

Aulén’s starting place is holiness: “Holiness is the foundation on which the whole *gudsbild* rests”.²¹⁵ This is surprising given what we have read in *DKG* from just four years earlier because now Aulén gives the impression that the Divine Love is dependent on holiness rather than agape itself being the central tenet of the Christian faith. “Only when holiness colors the concept of love do we understand that we are dealing with divine love”.²¹⁶ Whilst Aulén is working against 19th-century theological anthropomorphisms, this section must be read considering Swedish theology’s rejection of dialectical theology. Instead, he is basing his work on the ideas of Nathan Söderblom, who had observed that holiness is a concept used widely in religions in general to divide the sacred from the profane.²¹⁷ Remembering the Lund School’s methodology, it is particularly important for Aulén that we are discussing a religious and not ethical or philosophical category.²¹⁸ That, I believe, is because he is wanting to stress that his research is starting on objective findings specifically related to this discipline and therefore, we are not dependent on philosophy or ethics to explain the Christian faith. So, the purpose of this emphasis is not to assert God’s absolute ‘otherness’ but rather that

²⁰⁹ Aulén, 1931a, 6. However, in practice, he fails to escape his own Swedish Lutheran context.

²¹⁰ Aulén, 1931a, 7. My paraphrase of “kristendoms livsfrågor intresserad allmänhet”.

²¹¹ Aulén, 1954, 2; Aulén, 1931a, 12.

²¹² My trans. “*I Den Gudomliga Kärleken; II Den Gudomliga Kärlekens Väg; III Den Gudomliga Kärlekens Samfund*” from the contents page of Aulén, 1931a, 478–481. These became the slightly more prosaic “The Living God”, “The Act of God in Christ” and “The Church of God” in the fourth edition of *DAKT*. See Aulén, 1954, Contents; Aulén, 1943, 492–494.

²¹³ Aulén, 1931a, 478. My trans. “*Den Kristna Gudsbilden*”.

²¹⁴ There is a difference of section numbering, but not of content between the Swedish Aulén, 1931a and English Aulén, 1954. The former starts with §13 and the latter §12.

²¹⁵ Aulén, 1931a, 151. My trans. “Heligheten är så den förutsättning, på vilken hela gudsbilden vilar”.

²¹⁶ Aulén, 1954, 122, Aulén, 1931a, 151, “Först när heligheten får giva sin färg åt kärleken, förstå vi att vi verkligen ha att göra med en gudomlig kärlek”.

²¹⁷ Aulén, 1927, 349ff from Söderblom’s study in the history of religions and psychology of religion.

²¹⁸ Aulén, 1954, 121, See also Aulén, 1927, 348–256, entitled “Helighetsmotivet”.

“Holiness stands as a sentinel”²¹⁹ keeping metaphysical speculation and anthropology away from the Christian’s expression of faith. That is because “holiness emphasizes the separation between the divine and the human”²²⁰ meaning we cannot slip into pantheistic mysticism which subsumes the two, or rationalisation which reduces the divine to the human and, therefore, also rubs out the differences between God and man making them one.²²¹

6.2.2. Tension and Unity in the Picture-of-God²²²

So, with that cleared up, Aulén continues by promoting love as the central point of the Christian *gudsbild*. He states that “That Christian faith centers in divine love as the essential element in the Christian view-of-God is of utmost and decisive importance”.²²³ An incorrect *gudsbild* develops when different “affirmations about God”²²⁴ that should be held together in tension are merged to create a compromised picture-of-God. He stresses three key Divine affirmations which can vie for attention – *power*, *judgment* and *love*.²²⁵ Tensions between these three can be seen in examples such as, ‘how can a God of love co-exist with His hatred of sin’? Or, ‘If He is all powerful why is there evil’? Pre- and post-reformation scholasticism has tried to find rational solutions for these questions, but always waters down the truth as a result. For Aulén, the existence of these tensions does not destroy the reality that there is a “unity”, a “center” or “heart” to the Christian faith. So that, “in the last analysis all the affirmations of the Christian faith about God are concentrated around the central idea of God’s Agape”.²²⁶ Here one can see an example of my earlier assertion about viewing Aulén through the lens of a ‘single overriding conception’ as fitting to his own way of thinking.

6.2.3. God is Love

For Aulén, it is “Christ and his work”²²⁷ which defines the Christian *gudsbild*. The believer meets Christ as the one who has sought them out and created fellowship with them even

²¹⁹ Aulén, 1954, 123. Aulén, 1931a, 152, “Heligheten gör vidare vaktjänst”.

²²⁰ Aulén, 1954, 124; Aulén, 1931a, 153, “Slutligen framhäver helighetsaspekten distansen mellan det gudomliga och det mänskliga”.

²²¹ Aulén, 1954, 124. Aulén, 1931a, 153.

²²² Aulén, 1931a, 154. My trans., “Gudsbildens spänning och gudbildens enhetlighet”.

²²³ Aulén, 1954, 125. I have changed the original translators’ use of the phrase “conception of God” for my own phrase, “view-of-God” in light of my discussion in the previous chapter; Aulén, 1931a, 155, “Det för den kristna gudsbilden avgörande blir fixeringen av vad det innebär, att den kristna tron kretsar kring den gudomliga kärleken såsom det för den kristna gudsbilden väsentliga”.

²²⁴ Aulén, 1954, 126; Aulén, 1931a, 155, “trosutsagorna om Gud”.

²²⁵ Aulén, 1954, 126, italics in original; Aulén, 1931a, 155, “*maktkomplexet...domskomplexet...kärlekskomplexet*”, italics in original.

²²⁶ Aulén, 1954, 129–130; Aulén, 1931a, 159, “Så samlar sig i sista hand alla den kristna trons utsagor kring Guds agape såsom centrum”.

²²⁷ Aulén, 1954, 130; Aulén, 1931a, 160, “Kristus och hans gärning”.

though they are sinful. Therefore, the Christian experiences God's love as the centre of their relationship with God.²²⁸ So, says Aulén, ““God is agape,” summarizes not only that which is essential for the New Testament, but also everything that can be said about the character of the Christian” *gudsbild*.²²⁹ But this fellowship needs to be created purely by the love of God and not via rationalism or legalism. The Gospel is “foolishness to the Greeks” because it is against reason that God should come down to meet with sinners.²³⁰ But likewise, God does not meet with humanity on the premise of “legal justice”.²³¹

In an echo of what I have noted from *DKG*, Aulén goes on to state there are two elements of the Divine Love which should be emphasised, “the spontaneity and the self-giving”.²³² He goes on to clarify that “God's love is *always* prevenient. Its cause is not something outside of God, but in God himself and in his nature”.²³³ As such it can meet sinners and is never conditioned by humans fulfilling a certain criterion.

But Divine Love is also “self-giving” and Aulén emphasises that this means that God is literally giving Himself.²³⁴ This Christian view is defined by the Cross, “hereby we know love, because he laid down his life for us”.²³⁵ This is an important clarification from his view in *DKG* where only the word “giving” is used.

6.2.4. The Opposition of Love to Evil

DAKT was written in the interwar period but it is easy to imagine how it resonated when read during, or after, WW2. That is because Aulén describes Divine Love not as passive but active in “unbroken opposition to everything which is not in harmony with, or hostile and indifferent to it”²³⁶ in contrast to the “enfeebled” and “humanized” versions of love he detects in post-Enlightenment theology.²³⁷ Rather God acts in judgment and indeed, wrath. He believes that Luther is the foremost person in church history to wrestle with this particular paradox of faith.²³⁸ Luther believed that the wrath of God is active in the present, not just in the future²³⁹

²²⁸ Aulén, 1954, 131; Aulén, 1931a, 161.

²²⁹ Aulén, 1954, 131; Aulén, 1931a, 161, “»Gud är agape» sammanfattar icke bara det för nya testamentet som mest väsentliga utan också allt som överhuvudtaget kan utsägas om den kristna gudsbildens kvalitet”.

²³⁰ 1 Cor 1:32; Aulén, 1954, 132; Aulén, 1931a, 162.

²³¹ Aulén, 1954, 132; Aulén, 1931a, 163, “rättsordningen”.

²³² Aulén, 1954, 133, Aulén, 1931a, 163, “spontaneitet och självutgivelse”.

²³³ Aulén, 1954, 133, italics in original; Aulén, 1931a, 163, “Guds kärlek är *alltid* förekommande. Den har icke sin grund i något vid sidan av Gud, utan allenast i Gud själv, i hans »natur»”, italics in original.

²³⁴ Aulén, 1954, 134; Aulén, 1931a, 164.

²³⁵ 1 Jn 3:16, Aulén, 1954, 135; Aulén, 1931a, 164.

²³⁶ Aulén, 1954, 137; Aulén, 1931a, 167, “obruten motsättning till allt som icke harmonierar med, allt som är fientligt eller indifferent i förhållande till densamma”.

²³⁷ Aulén, 1954, 138; Aulén, 1931a, 168, “förvekligad” and ” »humaniserande»”.

²³⁸ Aulén, 1954, 138; Aulén, 1931a, 168.

²³⁹ Aulén, 1954, 138; Aulén, 1931a, 168.

because “God is always and under all circumstances hostile to sin”.²⁴⁰ God’s wrath contains His love not because God is capricious, but because He is always acting to destroy the impurity which stands in opposition to Divine Love and “it must react against that which is incompatible with itself”.²⁴¹ Theology has often used the word “righteousness” to express this utter rejection of evil.²⁴² Aulén noted that God’s total opposition to malevolence is not complete unless we consider that God acts and pays a high price to overcome it. He does not remain at a distance but moves in self-sacrificial love. Therefore, “The cross stands in the center of God’s dealings with” humanity.²⁴³ God’s love is therefore also revealed as sovereign, triumphant and transformational.²⁴⁴

6.2.5. The Sovereignty of Love

Aulén has so far been dismissive of the concepts which are traditionally studied under the heading of the ‘attributes of God’ because these are “speculative concerns which are foreign to faith”.²⁴⁵ However, he does address five of them under the caveat that they are considered within the framework of the sovereignty of love.

He tackles *omnipotence* by writing that faith believes that “nothing is outside the sphere of God’s power”²⁴⁶ whilst at the same time acknowledging that not everything that happens reflects the Divine will.

When it comes to the idea of *eternity*, Aulén acknowledges that faith experiences God “in time and effectively active in whatever happens here”²⁴⁷ without Him being contained within, or subject to, time. Following John 17:3, Aulén sees eternal life as related to living in communion with God.²⁴⁸

With the *unchangeableness* of God, Aulén wants to put the emphasis on the fact that God is constant in his total commitment to acting from his nature of Divine Love, rather than interpret this attribute in terms of *apatheia*, a term from Greek philosophy.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁰ Aulén, 1954, 140; Aulén, 1931a, 170, “Gud är alltid och under alla omständigheter »vred» på synden”.

²⁴¹ Aulén, 1954, 139; Aulén, 1931a, 169, “den måste reagera mot det som är oförenligt med densamma”.

²⁴² Aulén, 1954, 141; Aulén, 1931a, 171.

²⁴³ Aulén, 1954, 142; Aulén, 1931a, 172, “Korset står i mittpunkten av Guds historia med mänskligheten”. Aulén’s Swedish uses the non-gender specific term for “humanity” which is why I have not drawn attention to the translators’ inappropriate use of “man” in the main text.

²⁴⁴ Aulén, 1954, 142; Aulén, 1931a, 173. Aulén uses these three words in the last three sentences of §16.

²⁴⁵ Aulén, 1954, 147; Aulén, 1931a, 177, “man har mer än eljest opererat med en för troslivet främmande och konstruktiv spekulatión”.

²⁴⁶ Aulén, 1954, 148; Aulén, 1931a, 179, “Intet ligger utanför Guds maktsfär”.

²⁴⁷ Aulén, 1954, 149, italics in original; Aulén, 1931a, 180, “det är tvärtom väsentligt för tron att tänka sig Gud såsom varande med i tiden, såsom effektivt verksam i det som här sker”, italics in original.

²⁴⁸ Aulén, 1954, 150; Aulén, 1931a, 180.

²⁴⁹ Aulén, 1954, 150; Aulén, 1931a, 181.

For Aulén, the most importance thing about the Christian view of God's *omnipresence* is that it is not pantheism. Rather, he says, that it is talking about the fact that God's Divine Love is present unhindered in every place.²⁵⁰

Aulén interprets *omniscience* in the simple sense that nothing is hidden from God.²⁵¹ In regards to salvation, he rejects the concept that this has anything to do with God's foreknowledge of whether individuals would have chosen God themselves.

He rounds off this section by saying that "Love is always a sovereign, almighty, eternal, active, and all-seeing love... the sovereign power of all the universe".²⁵²

6.2.6. The Living God

In the final part of this section, Aulén wants to emphasise that God is both immanent and transcendent. To reflect the first concept, he highlights that whilst the revelation of God was finished in Christ, at the same time it is "continually going on"²⁵³ in the present through the Spirit. Faith also acknowledges transcendence - that there is a separation between humans and God. For the Christian, the paradox of God's simultaneous nearness and distance is experienced in a growing sense of their "unworthiness in the presence of divine love".²⁵⁴

Historically, Christianity has had to battle against philosophically derived views of divinity and Aulén reads the over-emphasis on transcendence in medieval and post-Enlightenment theologies as a type of Arianism. But, thanks to Hegel, immanence dominated theologies have taken away the distance between God and humanity. However, Aulén would rather see a "tension-filled synthesis"²⁵⁵ than tip over into one or the other of these views.

The final section addresses the issue of God's personality and acknowledges that this language is unbiblical and that what "person" means today is not equivalent to what it meant in the historical Trinitarian and Christological debates.²⁵⁶ Aulén is content to use the word, but observes that it must have a "symbolic character".²⁵⁷ Positively, the word works against

²⁵⁰ Aulén, 1954, 151; Aulén, 1931a, 181.

²⁵¹ Aulén, 1954, 151; Aulén, 1931a, 182.

²⁵² Aulén, 1954, 152; Aulén, 1931a, 182, "den gudomliga kärleken – denna är alltid till såsom suverän, såsom en allsmäktig, evig, alltid verksam, allt genomskådande kärlek... [Den är] tillvarons suveräna makt".

²⁵³ Aulén, 1954, 154; Aulén, 1931a, 184, "något ständigt fortgående".

²⁵⁴ Aulén, 1954, 155; Aulén, 1931a, 185, "sitt ovärde inför gudomliga kärlekens renhet".

²⁵⁵ Aulén, 1954, 158; Aulén, 1931a, 189, "spänningsfyllda syntes".

²⁵⁶ Aulén, 1954, 159; Aulén, 1931a, 190.

²⁵⁷ Aulén, 1931a, 190. My trans. "symbolisk karaktär". Here the English translators opted for the non-literal phrase "a figure of speech" (Aulén, 1954, 159). It is unfortunate that they chose to do that at this small point would become a major idea in his later work known in English as *The Drama and the Symbols*, Aulén, 1970; Aulén, 1965.

the loss of personality which occurs in pantheism and emphasises that God has called us into relationship with Him.²⁵⁸

6.3. Summary

Aulén starts his discussion of the Christian picture-of-God by grounding it in the universal religious idea of “holiness”, a concept that is used to express the division between the sacred and the profane. In this section holiness is given priority in shaping the Christian *gudsbild*.²⁵⁹

However, in the following section, he returns to the assertion that the fundamental view-of-God in Christianity is that God is Love.²⁶⁰ He acknowledges that the Christian faith has other concepts related to the Divine, including power and judgment which often appear alongside love. His challenge to faith is to maintain these as a unity-in-tension without rationalising one away at the expense of the others.

It is God’s work in Christ that has brought Aulén to this conclusion of the centrality of the statement “God is Love”. This is experienced as being accepted into relationship with God despite awareness of our own shortcomings. This love has the character of being “spontaneous and self-giving”, God choosing to come to us of his own volition and not determined by any outside source such as the Law or our own merits.

Aulén believed that one of the weaknesses of 1700s and 1800s theology is a monism that denies the reality of evil. But Divine Love is active and not passive, opposing that which stands against it. He finds help in Luther’s understanding of God’s wrath as God working in Love to purify or destroy that which is not good. God’s opposition to evil is therefore an action not just a theory.

Aulén is not keen on the traditional attributes of God as these categories are foreign to way the of faith. However, he is willing to consider them in the light of the centrality of Divine Love. To this end he looks briefly at God’s omnipotence, eternity, unchangeableness, omniscience and omnipresence.

Finally, faith sees God from both the transcendent and immanent perspective. He is wary of the traps of deism and pantheism and instead wants to keep the ideas in tension rather than solve them. Another category that faith has used to try to express the character of God is the word “person”. Whilst acknowledging its weaknesses, ultimately Aulén favours this language as it helps us understand the idea of having a relationship with God.

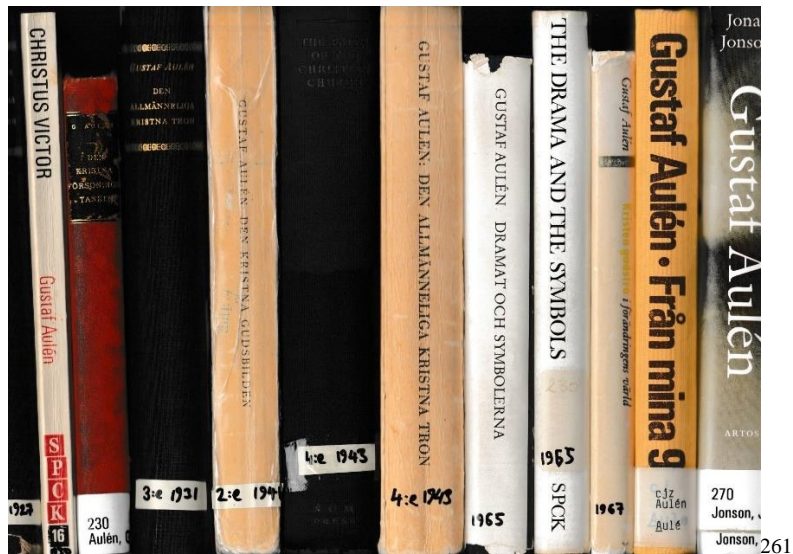
²⁵⁸ Aulén, 1954, 160; Aulén, 1931a, 191.

²⁵⁹ See especially, Aulén, 1954, 122; Aulén, 1931a, 151.

²⁶⁰ See, for example, the introductory comments to the section on Aulén, 1954, 130, §14; Aulén, 1931a, 160, §15.

. RECONSIDERING THE BASIS OF AGAPE LOVE

Chapter 7. From Aulén's View to Contemporary Reflections



The purpose of this short chapter is to transition from a discussion of Aulén's own writings that has dominated Part 2 and move towards the third part of the essay which aims to reconsider Aulén's ideas in the light of later theological developments. That is to say that this chapter is a "hinge" between the two halves of my research question.

7.1. Summary of Aulén's View of Agape Love

Having surveyed my three core texts by Aulén one at a time, it may be helpful to summarise the overall findings in a succinct fashion before moving on to my own evaluation of his views. So, for Aulén, the essence of the Christian *gudsbild* is that of Agape Love which he defines in *DKG* as "spontaneously giving, free and sovereign". Given the emphasis in *DAKT* on this giving as God's own "self-giving", I want to suggest that Aulén's view can be more clearly explained as "spontaneous, self-giving, free and sovereign". This four-word summary is rooted in Aulén's understanding of Jesus' death on the cross as an act of God Himself which defeats tyrannical powers, that is, his classical idea of the atonement. Agape Love is

²⁶¹ A collection of Aulén's works used for this study.

explained as a picture-of-God which is clearly visible in the NT in direct contrast to the OT where a legal justice is the dominant *gudsbild*. Whilst the Father and the Spirit are mentioned, Aulén's interpretation of Agape Love is firmly rooted in a Christocentric and cruciform understanding of the Christian faith.

7.2. Reassessing Aulén's View in the Light of Later Developments

After this survey a wider variety of ways of reflecting on Aulén's work are possible. However, I have decided to reflect on his work in the light of later theological developments. The reason for this is that reading the texts now, nearly one hundred years after they were written, it is very hard to ignore the trends of contemporary theological reflection and question what light they bring to bear on Aulén's thought. Many authors have been inspired by Aulén's *Christus Victor* theory to develop new models of the atonement driven by the questions of later 20th-century developments which Aulén himself never would have considered. Therefore, in a similar way, I am going to look at Aulén's view of Agape through the lens of later theological developments and want to consider what bearing they might have on his idea of Divine Love.

So, in the final third of this essay I plan to accept Aulén's four-word definition of God's Agape Love. However, I want to reconsider two elements which undergird Aulén's thinking in the light of developments in theology that occurred after his death. Firstly, his view is heavily dependent on an anthesis between God's Law and God's Love, but since the late 1970s NT studies has begun to reassess the interpretative methods used to understand the Law in the NT in a way which is very different from Aulén's approach. How do these later ideas relate to Aulén's thoughts? A second area of Christian theology which has been reassessed since the late 1970s is the place of the Trinity in systematic theology. What does Aulén say about the Trinity and how can a more deeply rooted Trinitarian theology help to elucidate the meaning of God's Divine Love? These two areas, the Law and the Trinity, will take up the remainder of my time in the following chapters.

Chapter 8. Aulén and The Law



Gustaf Aulén.
Fotografi.

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8.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to critically evaluate the view of the Law presented in the three books by Aulén that I have reviewed in the previous chapters. In a manner not unlike *CV*, we will consider this from the perspectives of historical theology and Biblical studies. In section 2, I will outline Aulén's view on the Law which I suggest is antinomian in that it is against the Law both in terms of salvation and of sanctification. Then, in section 3, I will show that Aulén's position does not match Luther's view of the Law. Section 4 is an analysis of the impact of antinomian teaching on Protestant NT studies in the second half of the 20th-century. Finally, in section 5, I will consider the emphasis of the OT on Aulén's Law-Love division of the two Testaments.

8.2. Aulén's Antinomian View of the Law

In the opening sections of this essay, I noted that one of the most popular areas of Aulén studies is his *lex creationis*. However, that view first emerged in 1943 after he had become Bishop of Strängnäs.²⁶³ Before that Aulén had a different view of the Law, but as this appears most clearly in *DKG* (which was never published in English) this earlier position is never considered in the secondary literature.

²⁶² Photo of Gustaf Aulén taken in 1907 on his ordination to priest in the Swedish Church.

²⁶³ Ljungh, 2012, 183.

In the three Aulén texts I have discussed, whilst he does occasionally mention that the Law is “holy and righteous and good”,²⁶⁴ the overall presentation of Torah is extremely negative. We are given a view of the Law in which it stands in antithesis to the Gospel and the God of Love. Aulén means more than the Pentateuch when he says “the Law”; he is talking about the whole religion of the OT. So, according to Aulén, “Judaism’s faith in God operates on the level of a legal system”.²⁶⁵ The faith of the OT is presented in Pelagian terms as a religion of human works-based righteousness through merit in contrast to a God-given salvation through faith alone. This can be seen in Aulén’s own presentation of the Christian *gudsbild* in Book One of *DKG*,²⁶⁶ and his reflections on Luther’s *gudsbild* in Book Five.²⁶⁷

Further confirmations of Aulén’s stance can be seen when he considers the work Marcion.²⁶⁸ Aulén is not as enthusiastic about the second century theologian as Harnack,²⁶⁹ but the Swede does see Marcion in a very positive light commenting that, “his interpretation of Christianity is one of the most striking and original in the whole of history of Christian thought”.²⁷⁰ The reason for his praise includes Marcion’s insight that, “it is love and not justice, or legalism, that shapes God’s... relationship to humanity”.²⁷¹

DAKT also presents the same picture of the Law, for example, in a section of the prolegomena on the Revelation of God entitled, “Christianity and Judaism”.²⁷² According to Aulén, “The Old Testament religion was pre-eminently the religion of *law*. The relationship between God and man is conceived of a relation regulated by law”.²⁷³

Further traces of this antinomian stance can also be seen in *CV*:

²⁶⁴ Aulén, 1931b, 69. Watson, 1953, 153 observed both positive and negative views of the Law in Luther.

²⁶⁵ Aulén, 1927, 26. My trans., “Judendoms gudstro rör sig på rättsordningens plan”.

²⁶⁶ Aulén, 1927, 13ff, see my Chapter 3.

²⁶⁷ Aulén, 1927, 159ff.

²⁶⁸ Aulén, 1927, 62ff and Aulén, 1954, 38; Aulén, 1931a, 50. Because of Harnack’s interest in Marcion, he is also mentioned in other Lundensian theologians works, such as Bring, 1981, 9; Nygren, 1936, 29; Wingren, 1976, 8.

²⁶⁹ Bring, 1981, 9.

²⁷⁰ Aulén, 1927, 63. My trans., “hans kristendomstolkning är en av de märkligaste och originellaste i hela den kristna tankens historia”.

²⁷¹ Aulén, 1927, 68. My trans., “Det är kärleken och icke rättvisandet, icke legaliteten, som präglar Guds... förhållande till människorna”.

²⁷² Aulén, 1954, 37–42; Aulén, 1931a, 49–54.

²⁷³ Aulén, 1954, 39, italics in original; Aulén, 1931a, 51. “Det gamla testamentets religion var framför allt *lagens* religion. Förhållandet mellan Gud och människa är först och sist fattat såsom ett av lagen reglerat rättsförhållande”, italics in original.

The way of legal righteousness which the Law recommends, or, rather, demands, can never lead to salvation and life. It leads, like the way of human merit, not to God, but away from God, and deeper and deeper into sin.²⁷⁴

Such texts express in the most pointed way Paul's opposition to Judaism and to all legalistic religion.²⁷⁵

The Divine Love cannot be imprisoned in the categories of merit and of justice.²⁷⁶

So, in the three books I have looked at, Aulén presents a unified front regarding his view of the religion of the OT; it promotes a legalistic, works-based system of belief.

8.3. Aulén and Luther on the Law

Aulén claims that his view of the Law is Luther's own position. For example, in *CV*, he says that the Reformer taught that the Law was synonymous with a works-based religion, "According to Luther, the way of the Law *cannot* take us to the goal [salvation], this way shows itself to be a false way, a way of works, the way of climbing up [to God]".²⁷⁷ But it is highly questionable that the former monk understood the Law in this way. The two agree that the Law is not a means of salvation, as Watson summarises the Reformer, "We are saved by grace, not by the works of the Law".²⁷⁸ And Luther does draw the same antithesis between the grace of the Gospel and the 'doing' of the Law.²⁷⁹ But it does not do justice to Luther's position regarding the Law to leave it here.

The writers of the Formula of Concord (1557) outline three uses of the Law that have formed the basis of Lutheran orthodoxy's thought on the topic. Firstly, the Law is the basis of civic society as it limits the extent of sin. Secondly, the Law makes humans aware of their sin. Thirdly, the Law is to be a guide to Christian living.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ Aulén, 1931b, 68 (see also 79, 81); Aulén, 1930, 122 "den »gärningarnas» väg, som lagen rekommenderar eller, rättare sagt, påbjuder, kan i själva verket aldrig leda till »frälsning». Den leder, just som den mänskliga förtjänstens (Rom. 4:4) väg, icke till Gud utan bort från Gud, allt djupare in i synd".

²⁷⁵ Aulén, 1931b, 68; Aulén, 1930, 123, "I dessa tankegångar kommer Paulus' motsättning mot judendom, mot rättsordningens religion till de starkaste och mest tillspetsade uttryck". The "such texts" are Rm 4:4, Rm 7:9, Rm 7:4, Gal 3:13, Col 2:14 and Rm 10:4 which are all quoted in the paragraph before this sentence.

²⁷⁶ Aulén, 1931b, 68; Aulén, 1930, 123, "den gudomliga kärleken kan icke fångas och låsas in i rättsordningens kategorier". See also, Aulén, 1931b, 79 and 81; Aulén, 1930, 138-9 and 142.

²⁷⁷ My trans. Aulén, 1930, 191, "enligt Luther, lagens väg icke kan föra till målet – att dess väg avslöjar sig såsom en falsk väg, gärningens väg, vägen nedifrån-uppåt". Hebert's translation of this sentence adds that this is a "Pelagian way" even though Aulén does not literally say that. See Aulén, 1931b, 112.

²⁷⁸ Watson, 1954, 154.

²⁷⁹ Luther, 1525, 136.

²⁸⁰ Concord, 1921, Online: <https://bookofconcord.org/solid-declaration/third-use-of-the-law/> n.p.

We can see all three of these ideas in Luther's own sermons and writings. He outlines the first use of the Law in his sermon, "How Christians should regard Moses".²⁸¹ Then in both the Smalcald Articles²⁸² and his "Preface to the Old Testament"²⁸³ the Law is presented in its' second use. Finally, the Third use of the Law is clear in his Small and Large Catechisms, when the Ten Commandments are presented as essential Christian teaching.²⁸⁴

During Luther's lifetime he would meet opposition to his views including from one of his own disciples, Johannes Agricola, who thought that Christians were freed from the Law and did not need it to continually remind the believer of what to do.²⁸⁵ But Luther was typically ruthless in his rejection of Agricola coining the phrase "antinomian" to describe his pupil's position. Luther countered the antinomians of his day by saying that "the Law must not be removed from the Church, but must be retained and faithfully driven home".²⁸⁶

Therefore, we can conclude that Aulén seems very far from Luther in his approach; Aulén only talks about the Law in negative terms as a false way of salvation; Luther acknowledges this, but in contrast to Aulén, he also sees that the Law has three different positive functions and these were canonised in Lutheran thinking through their affirmation in the Book of Concord.

It is worthy of note that Aulén's antinomian views were shared by his Lundensian colleagues Ragnar Bring,²⁸⁷ Anders Nygren²⁸⁸ and even Gustaf Wingren's creation theology denied the third use of the Law.²⁸⁹ Antinomianism can also be seen in the work of Anton Fridrichsen (1888–1953),²⁹⁰ who is quoted by Aulén in *CV*.²⁹¹ This Norwegian NT scholar was a lecturer at Uppsala (1928–1953) and friend of Aulén. Fridrichsen would also exert a great influence on his student, Krister Stendahl (1921–2008), and the latter described the Norwegian academic as his "exegetical father".²⁹² But this relationship would have surprising consequences in the 20th-century which can be discussed by considering some of the changes that have taken place in NT studies since the 1980s.

²⁸¹ Luther, 1525, 140–142.

²⁸² Luther, 1537, 517.

²⁸³ Luther, 1523, 127.

²⁸⁴ Luther, 1529; Concord, 1921, "The Larger Catechism". Online: <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/preface/> n.p.

²⁸⁵ Marius, 1999, 478-9.

²⁸⁶ Luther in Burns, 2017.

²⁸⁷ Bring, 1981, 9.

²⁸⁸ Nygren, 1936, 28-29.

²⁸⁹ Wingren, 1976, 15.

²⁹⁰ Fridrichsen, 1931, 35.

²⁹¹ Aulén, 1931b, 75ff; Aulén, 1930, 132ff. See also Gerhardsson, 1994, 143 and Jonson, 2011, 111.

²⁹² Stendahl, 1976, vi. Stendahl is even more positive in his evaluation of Fridrichsen in Stendahl, 1972.

8.4. Aulén and Stendahl's Views of the Law

8.4.1. A Change of Perspective in the OT-NT Relationship

The final quarter of the 20th-century saw a dramatic change in NT studies as scholars re-evaluated the Jewishness of Christianity's central documents and characters, not least Jesus and Paul. This reassessment has been one of the main catalysts to movements such as *The Third Quest for the Historical Jesus* and *The New Perspective on Paul*. Whilst these terms embrace a wide variety of scholarly views on Jesus and Paul, they tend to emphasise the Jewish nature of the milieu of early Christianity and accentuate continuity, rather than discontinuity, between the covenants, in distinct contrast to Aulén's approach.

8.4.2. Stendahl: A Counter-reaction to the Swedish Lutheran Church of Aulén

I will be drawing my critique of Aulén from authors who are considered part of these movements, not least one important scholar whose work facilitated this reassessment of the NT, Krister Stendahl. He was born in Sweden where he lived for the first 33 years of his life. He was ordained in the *Svenska Kyrka* and undertook all his theological education in Uppsala, just as Aulén had done. Also, like Aulén, he would end his career as a bishop in the Church of Sweden.²⁹³ Although Stendahl studied at the rival theological college, his time at Uppsala (c. 1940–1954) coincided with the zenith of Lundensian Theology in Sweden, so it is impossible to imagine that he did not read Aulén and his colleagues' works. Whilst Stendahl is rightly acknowledged as a Harvard scholar as he worked there for 30 years, he first wrote his seminal essay, *The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West*, in Swedish in 1960, when he had only lived in USA for six years.²⁹⁴ In fact, he later states that he made a break with the received view of Judaism in the *Svenska Kyrka* when he was a priest to the students at Uppsala University between 1948–1950.²⁹⁵ Therefore, the "West" he is talking about in that paper is Aulén's Sweden and the theology which reads Luther guilt-stricken conscience into the NT is that of Swedish theologians like Aulén who were members of the Lutheran *Svenska Kyrka*. It seems that shortly after emigrating and now at a safe distance, Stendahl feels free to criticise the Lutheranism of his country of origin. And whilst he does

²⁹³ Stendahl was Bishop of Stockholm for four years before his retirement in 1988. See his obituary, Krister Stendahl 1984–1988. 2022. Online: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/stockholmsstift/krister-stendahl-19841988>.

²⁹⁴ Stendahl, 1976, v. This paper was published in English in 1963 but Stendahl tells his readers of the origin of the work in the preface of his book "Paul among Jews the Gentiles".

²⁹⁵ Stendahl, K. 1984, 4.

not name the Lundensian School, his critique is clearly directed at the type of view Aulén held. For example,

The Reformers' interpretation of Paul rests on an analogism when Pauline statements about Faith and Works, Law and Gospel, Jews and Gentiles are read in the framework of late medieval piety. The Law, the Torah with its specific requirements of circumcision and food restrictions becomes a general principle of "legalism" in religious matters.²⁹⁶

So, Stendahl's paper can clearly be read as a counterreaction to the type of Lutheran teaching that Aulén and others in the *Svenska Kyrka* were promoting during the research period.

We now know that the Swedish Harvard professor's paper would become one of the main catalysts birthing the NPP. Therefore, Aulén, by the law of unintended consequences, was a contributor to the rise of this movement as an advocate of the type of theology that Stendahl rejected. Specifically, Stendahl wanted to shun the Swedish Lutheranism of the first half of the 20th-century, the very Church and time where Aulén played a leading role in forming its' systematic theology and liturgical life.

8.5. Aulén's Law-Love Dichotomy and the OT Witness

I have now considered Aulén's own view which is not the same as Luther's. Furthermore, I have highlighted how Aulén's position helped to create the theological context for Stendahl's famous article which would have a huge impact within 20th-century Protestant theology.

In this next section I want to move from discussing Aulén's view from the perspective of historical theology, to a discussion grounded in Biblical studies, following the method Aulén himself used in Chapter 4 of *CV*. In *DKG*, Aulén states that the OT does contain the concepts of "kindness, mercy, grace, etc."²⁹⁷ However, he goes on to say that the focus of the Jewish Scriptures is that these are only given to the pious and he quotes Psalm 103:17–18 and 2 Esdras 8:34 as proof texts.²⁹⁸ In this section I want to question whether Aulén's assessment of the OT teachings is correct.

8.5.1. The NT Links Law and Love

If Stendahl's essay and W.D. Davies' *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* were catalysts, then E.P. Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* was the chemical reaction, the event that started the NPP movement. E.P. Sanders (1937–2022) was an American NT scholar who worked at Duke University for the last 15 years of his academic career. He explains that the Apostle was

²⁹⁶ Stendahl, 1976, 85-86.

²⁹⁷ Aulén, 1927, 26. My trans. "misskund, barmhärthighet, nåd o.s.v."

²⁹⁸ Aulén, 1927, 26-27. This is also mentioned in my chapter on *DKG*.

not fighting against his legalistic Jewish heritage, but accepting and modifying the OT promises in the light of Christ's fulfilment of the covenant. In contrast to Aulén's juxtaposition of the Law and Love, Sanders sees a connection between the two concepts.²⁹⁹ For example, both Jesus and Paul draw their Love-centred ethics from the Law. So, Jesus' version of the Greatest Commandments are a double imperative to love which are both taken directly from the Torah.³⁰⁰ Meanwhile, Paul's insistence that the Church should love their neighbour is a repetition of the same Levitical command used by Jesus.³⁰¹ So, for Jesus and Paul, agape is not that which is the opposite to the Law, but rather, in the Law we can find genuine expressions of Agape Love, words that would be foundational to NT ethics.

8.5.2. Agape in the OT as Covenantal Love

Throughout the OT we find multiple expressions of outright and unconditional love from God towards His creature, even in Torah where "themes of grace are implied even if not explicitly stated in almost every narrative of the Pentateuch".³⁰² This love is first and foremost expressed in the form of binding promises and commitments to Israel, the covenant, which is not the same thing as a legal document of demands. As Stendahl explained in his famous paper,

for the Jew the Law did not require a static or pedantic perfectionism but supposed a covenant relationship in which there was room for forgiveness and repentance and God applied a Measure of Grace.³⁰³

Later, E.P. Sanders would take this insight further, framing the theological self-understanding of the Jewish religion in Second Temple period as one of "covenantal nomism". But Aulén completely missed that the ethical demands of the OT appear in a covenantal context where God also makes provision for human failure in the sacrificial system so that "election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement".³⁰⁴ And when the question is asked, "Why did God make a covenant with Israel?" the answer is unanimous - because of God's Agape Love. This love is not an abstract concept but it is the source of several actions that God performs on behalf of the Jewish people, in particular, election and salvation.

²⁹⁹ Sanders, 1991, 85-87.

³⁰⁰ Cf Mt 22:38.

³⁰¹ The Greek word, *agapíseis*, is used in Mt 22:37, 39 and Gal 5:14, Rm 13:8 as well as in Lev 19:18 (LXX) and Dt 6:5 (LXX) that Jesus and Paul are quoting from. In another example, Heath suggests Paul uses a "typological expositions on grace and faith verses works and the law, drawing from the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar" 375.

³⁰² Heath, 2002, 372.

³⁰³ Stendahl, 1976, 201.

³⁰⁴ Sanders, 1977, 422.

8.5.3. Agape in the OT as Elective Love

God's choice of Israel as the forum for the divine-human relationship is always attributed to God's own sovereign choice and further reasoning is not given. For example, "Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations".³⁰⁵ But this loving election does not usually stand-alone as a naked fact. Instead, it is given as the motivation for God's action of blessing Israel, for example, giving help,³⁰⁶ giving them the land,³⁰⁷ giving them a king³⁰⁸ and giving healing and restoration.³⁰⁹ In Sanders' covenantal nomism system, God stands for both the choice of Israel and the maintenance of that election, so that one of the overriding themes of the Second Temple Jewish literature is that all is dependent on the mercy of God.³¹⁰

8.5.4. Agape in the OT as Saving Love

One further deed that the OT authors wrote about in the context of God's elective love is that God's action was not just a choosing but also had salvific consequences. In particular, they have in mind the Exodus, Israel's rescue from Egypt:

But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.³¹¹

In the prophetic literature, Hosea connects the acts of election and redemption with parental love expressed in affectionate and poetic language, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son".³¹² Stendahl reminds us that Matthew takes this text to be a messianic prophecy, one of many texts taken by this Gospel writer to emphasise the continuity between the OT and the salvific work of God in Christ.³¹³

8.6. Conclusion

³⁰⁵ Dt 10:15.

³⁰⁶ Is 44:2.

³⁰⁷ Ps 46:6.

³⁰⁸ 2 Chr 2:11.

³⁰⁹ Hos 14:4.

³¹⁰ Sanders, 1977, 421.

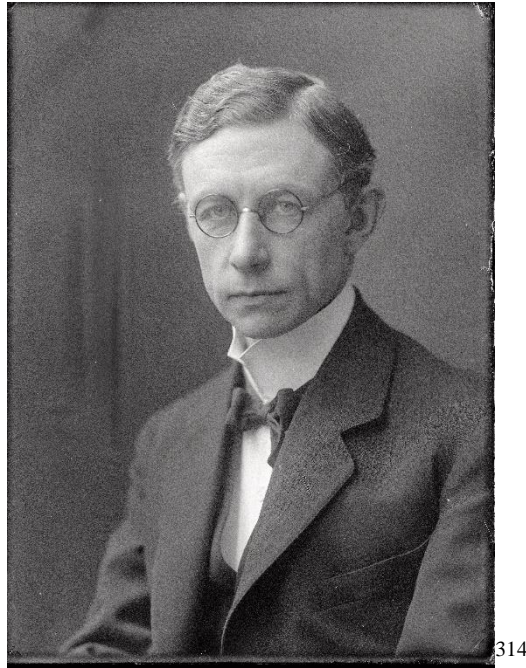
³¹¹ Dt 7:8 see also Dt 4:37, Hos 11:1 and Is 63:9 that link God's Agape Love with the rescue from Egypt. N.T. Wright argues that this element of the OT narrative was so important that by the time of Jesus that the Exodus had become a "controlling story" through which Jews saw their current oppression of the Romans. Wright, 2000, 29-30.

³¹² Hos 11:1.

³¹³ Cf. Mt 2:14-15. Stendahl, 1984, 73. Earlier, in his doctoral thesis from Uppsala, Stendahl points out that Matthew has translated this verse directly from the Hebrew text rather than quote the LXX version which does not have the messianic inference because it translates the Hebrew original as "out of Egypt I called my sons". Stendahl, 1954, 101.

In this chapter I have critically assessed Aulén's view of the Law as presented in *DKG*, *DAKT* and *CV*. I have called this position 'antinomian' and suggested that Aulén's approach does not agree with Luther's despite the Swede suggesting he is following the reformer. I have then considered the impact of this type of antinomian teaching on the work of Stendahl, who rejected the Swedish Lutheran interpretation of Paul as a Pharisee who left a works-based religion. Finally, by contrast, I have suggested that the God of the OT is revealed as a God of love who shows agape in His covenantal, elective and saving love.

Chapter 9. Aulén and the Trinity



9.1. Introduction

My contention in the previous chapter is that Aulén’s adoption of a Law-Love dichotomy makes him prone to the criticisms of Swedish Lutheran theologian, Stendahl, that many in “the West” have read Paul through Luther’s eyes. With the help of E.P. Sanders, who ran with Stendahl’s theory, I have put across an alternative reading of the Law and Love as a continuous expression of God’s Agape Love across the two Testaments.

However, I propose that there is still a difference between the two covenants in terms of *gudsbild* just as Aulén suggests. But, because he adopted this Law-Love contrast, he inadvertently masks perhaps the most important change in *gudsbild* – the move from a monotheistic to a Trinitarian picture-of-God. It would be unfair to say that he does not talk about it at all, but he does not draw any conclusions from this idea because he is more interested in the Law-Love dichotomy. But, unfortunately, Aulén does not present a strong Trinitarian picture-of-God across his oeuvre. By looking at this aspect of his work, I am achieving my second goal of assessing his work in the light of development in theology that started during his lifetime and flourished after his death. According to Gunton, the Trinitarian turn in systematic theology in the 20th-century has been an ecumenical phenomenon which

³¹⁴ A photo of Aulén from 1924, at the age of 45 yrs, the same age as the author of this essay.

can be seen in the works of Catholic, Karl Rahner (1904–1984), Russian orthodox, Vladimir Lossky (1903–1955) and Protestant, Barth. This emphasis was taken on in the late 20th-century by a plethora of writers, such as Gunton himself, to whom I will return at the end of the chapter.³¹⁵

9.2. The Trinity and the NPP

Writers from within the NPP differ as to when this break with OT monotheism takes place, in a manner not dissimilar from how Aulén describes the different positions he observed in 1927.³¹⁶ E.P. Sanders, whose work we have followed closely in the previous chapter, paints a picture of a historical Jesus that is in total continuity with his time to the extent that “we cannot say that a single one of the things known about Jesus is unique: neither his miracles, non-violence, eschatological hope or promise to the outcasts”.³¹⁷ Here he is in almost total agreement with Aulén’s take on Harnack’s 19th-century theology.³¹⁸ For Sanders, that which is singular about Jesus is the manner in which *his disciples* respond to his life, death and alleged resurrection. The unique thing about Jesus is therefore, “the result of his life and work ... [even though] the *claim* of resurrection was not unique”.³¹⁹ However, by the time Paul is writing, Sanders sees a development from this earlier understanding of the historical Jesus. Paul has started to accentuate an inconsistent Christology, which he has possibly borrowed from pre-Pauline fragments, so that we can see in Philippians 2:5-11 a view of Christ which is ‘high’, but in Romans 1:1-6 is ‘low’.³²⁰ And in his short book on Paul, Sanders never mentions the Trinity at all.

However, I want to follow the writings of Stendahl and N.T. Wright who suggest that the written Christian witness reflect a primitive Trinitarian character.³²¹

British Anglican, NT scholar and advocate of the NPP, N.T. Wright (b. 1948) brilliantly explains the first stages in the transition from Jewish monotheism to Christian Trinitarianism

³¹⁵ Gunton, 1997, 1.

³¹⁶ Aulén, 1927, 14ff.

³¹⁷ Sanders, 1985, 319.

³¹⁸ Aulén, 1927, 18.

³¹⁹ Sanders, 1985, 320.

³²⁰ Sanders, 1991, 82. The protagonists within the NPP have differing views on the development of NT Christology and some of the differences can be seen in Hill, 2015.

³²¹ I think one of the most compelling arguments for seeing the Trinity in the NT is presented in Hill, 2015. In contrast to the other works referenced here, it is a whole book dedicated to the subject whereas Wright and others only mention it as part of a wider argument. I have not presented Hill’s argument here as I have tried to confine my study to those within the NPP movement.

by looking at Paul's new theology.³²² In Deuteronomy, the Shema ends with the monotheistic proclamation, "...the LORD our God: the LORD is one".³²³ But Paul divides the two references to YHWH in this text ("the LORD" and "God") and assigns them to different persons. So, he writes in 1 Corinthians that they have "one God, the Father" *and* "one Lord, Jesus Christ".³²⁴ In the same letter Paul discusses the gifts of the Spirit, explaining that while they are different, they have the same origin. Surprisingly, their one source is the three persons of the Trinity as Paul equates the "Spirit", the "Lord" Jesus and "God" the Father with each other as the giver of the gifts.³²⁵

So, Wright helps us see that within twenty years of the crucifixion, resurrection and Pentecost these events have precipitated a breakdown in Paul's monotheistic view of God as a result of Christological and pneumatological experiences which have led him to redefine his *gudsbild*. As American Pentecostal theologian, Gordon Fee (1934–2022) writes,

if we are to truly understand Paul... we must begin with his thoroughly Trinitarian presuppositions. Not only has the coming of Christ changed everything for Paul, so too has the coming of the Spirit. In dealing with the Spirit, we are dealing with none other than the *personal presence of God* himself.³²⁶

On several occasions in his later writings, Stendahl makes mention of the importance of Trinitarian theology in the NT, but does not explain his reasoning in detail as Wright does. So, in an ecumenical context when writing a paper for the World Council of Churches conference, he reflects that he has learnt from Eastern Orthodoxy that a Christian is defined not just in relation to Christ but that a "Christian is one who believes and worships the Triune God".³²⁷ Elsewhere Trinitarianism is compared favourably to monism when he writes that the Trinity is "a most daring attempt at not sacrificing richness and diversity on the altars of theoretical monisms of various kinds".³²⁸ So yet again, the Swedish Lutheran-cum-Harvard professor, provides a challenge to Aulén's own views, this time highlighting the importance of a Trinitarian *gudsbild* as an essential part of the unique witness of the Christian faith.

9.3. Aulén's NT Trinitarianism

³²² These two paragraphs are a simplified version of Wright's argument which can be seen in full in Chapter 4 of Wright, 1997.

³²³ Dt 6:4.

³²⁴ 1 Cor 8:6. See Wright, 1997, 66. Gunton also sees this text as significant in the development of NT Christology. Gunton, 2002, 83.

³²⁵ 1 Cor 12:4-6, Wright, 1997, 93.

³²⁶ Fee, 1994, 6, italics in the original.

³²⁷ Stendahl, 1990, 5.

³²⁸ Stendahl, 1984, 1.

I mentioned at the beginning of my discussion on Aulén's *DKG*, that he wants to develop a distinctive Christian *gudsbild* by rejecting the "monism" of 19th-century German idealistic theology and the older Enlightenment theology, which emphasised Jesus as a prophet in continuity with Jewish monotheism. By contrast, Aulén posits that there is a unique Christian *gudsbild* that has its origin in the NT itself as a discontinuous element which is not found in the OT. Towards the end of the section I reviewed above, he tells us that the NT contains "theocentricity", "christocentricity" and "pneumatology"³²⁹ so that the first Christian witness talks about God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit. Put together they form a 'quiet' Trinitarianism in Aulén's presentation which can be missed because it is not in the centre of his thought and appears in passing as he focuses on God's Agape Love. I use the word 'quiet' because it was not the point Aulén was trying to make, but because the Trinitarian *gudsbild* is such a natural part of a discussion of the difference between the OT-NT view-of-God that it cannot help but come out in such a discussion. Aulén might not have seen it directly himself, but here he touches on one of the most important discoveries in his search for the unique Christian *gudsbild* contra Jewish and Hellenistic views - that one of the "new" things about the "New" Testament is the Trinitarian *gudsbild* in distinction from OT's monotheism. Therefore, as Aulén suggests, a new picture-of-God appears at the divide between the Testaments, a view that developed in the period prior to the writing of the NT as a result of the authors' experiences of the Christ event which is then consequentially reflected in their written documents.

9.3.1. A Problem with the Law-Love Dichotomy

So, I believe Aulén is correct in highlighting that a distinctive Christian *gudsbild* that differs from the OT view can be seen in the NT. However, I suggest that the dichotomy that can be seen would be better described as monotheism-Trinitarianism than Law-Love. One of the problems with Aulén's view is that it suggests that there is a change in the fundamental character of God from one who desires humans' good works as the basis of their salvation to one who comes to His creature in spontaneous love. This "revolution", as Aulén called it, raises questions as to whether the God of the OT was loving at all, what role works play under the new covenant given that they were good in the OT as well as the general question of divine immutability.

Though not without problems, the move from monotheism to Trinitarianism that I am proposing provides a consistency in the character of God and that the terms of the covenant in

³²⁹ Aulén, 1927. My trans. of "theocentricitet" (42), "kristocentricitet" (41) and "pneumatologi" (50).

the two Testaments remains the same – God’s gracious mercy. To tackle the issue of whether the NT’s Trinitarianism implies a change in the immanent divinity, I would argue that *God Himself* is not changing, only *our perspective* of Him is changing. The move from monotheism to Trinitarianism that I envisage is not a change in the economy of God from a rule-based divinity to one of mercy and grace, but rather, a deepening *revelation of the character of God*. That is to say that the one God that is so prominent in the OT, actually exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This revelation came to the early church as a pre-cognitive experience of the one God in Jesus and the Spirit which forced them to re-assess their monotheism. The experiential change in *gudsbild* is reflected in the NT writings in the way that the Trinitarian aspects of God are usually written about almost accidentally. The writers are often vague and/ or speaking about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit without explaining why they are using this nomenclature. However, from time to time, we see the authors deliberately using triadic expressions, such as Matthew’s baptismal formula which could well be rooted in Jesus’ own Trinitarian experience of a baptism of love.³³⁰

9.4. Minimal Trinitarianism in Aulén

Having introduced Aulén’s casual acknowledgement of the NT’s Trinitarianism and compared it with the more definite assertions of Trinitarianism from writers such as Stendahl, I now want to look more closely at what Aulén does and does not say about this classical definition of the Christian faith.

When Aulén was Bishop of Strängnäs he was involved in a substantial renewal of the *Svenska Kyrka*’s liturgy which were published in 1942–44 and remained in use until 1984.³³¹ Jonson suggests that Aulén was especially proud of this body of work and that this was actually his greatest legacy to Swedish Christianity.³³² Reflecting on these changes in his retirement, he highlights that reciting the Creed is something that belongs to the human act of confession, prayer and worship.³³³ By this definition the Trinity ought to have a central place in Aulén’s thought as the Lundensian methodology purposely focuses on “the Faith of the Christian Church” over theological-philosophical speculations of what God might be. Aulén further writes in this book from his retirement, that the liturgical committee had suggested that the Creed should be read in services every week and that he had noted that in practice

³³⁰ Coakley, 2013, 118.

³³¹ Jonson, 2011, 255.

³³² Jonson, 2011, see 9 and 249. Note that in Aulén, 1975, he spends 20 pages (147-167) describing this work and barely spends a page on CV (119-20).

³³³ Aulén, 1961, 116–118.

most churches chose the Apostolic Creed. However, Aulén recommends reading the Nicene Creed at important feast days and when Communion is celebrated.³³⁴

But whilst Aulén was positive about the role of the Creed in the liturgical life of the church, the Trinity played a much less significant role in his own theological formulations. He makes very limited use of the Trinity in these three works at all and appears to dismiss its relevance completely on the opening page of *DKG*. That is because when looking at church history we see that,

the presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity usually gives the impression of abstract and rather irrelevant speculations... [and in no way] does one have the sense of being in the heart of theology.³³⁵

In saying this Aulén reflects a critique that Gunton suggests is very common in the Western Church where many have concluded “if the real God is known as one, the tacking on of his threeness simply appears as an unnecessary complicating of the simple belief in God”.³³⁶ This seems to resonate with what I have observed in Aulén so that there is a disjuncture between his academic reasoning and his liturgical practise.

Consequently, the Swede gives just four pages to considering the Trinity in c 460 pages of *DAKT*. This appears in §29 at the end of his discussion of the work of Christ implying that the Trinity is a sub-section of Christology.³³⁷ Here, as elsewhere, Aulén rarely uses the familial terms for the Godhead preferring the nomenclature of God-Christ-Spirit to Father-Son-Spirit.³³⁸ One of the consequences of this is that it is not always clear when he uses the word “God” if he is referring to the ‘Father’ or the ‘Divine’ or the ‘Trinity’.

In his discussion of the tri-unity of God in *DAKT*, it is clear that Aulén’s thinking is heavily weighted towards the “one” rather than the “three” to the extent that he can say that “the ancient doctrine of the Trinity... affirms... pure monotheism”.³³⁹ This does not seem to agree with the view he puts forward in three years early *DKG* where NT Christology challenges OT monotheism which I have referred to above. This leads me to believe that, despite his protestations to the contrary, ultimately he has simply adopted his view from Harnack who, according to Aulén, taught that “Jesus takes his pure monotheistic faith in God

³³⁴ Aulén, 1961, 252–4.

³³⁵ Aulén, 1927, 5. My trans. “Men framställning av trinitetsläran ger väl oftast intryck av abstrakta och tämligen ovidkommande spekulationer... [och i intet] har man någon förmimelse av att befinna sig i teologins hjärtpunkt”.

³³⁶ Gunton, 1997, 3. Gunton credits Rahner with observation and discusses the idea more fully on *ibid.*, 32.

³³⁷ Aulén, 1954, 254–259; Aulén, 1931a, 284–289.

³³⁸ A word count from Aulén, 1954, §29 is indicative: God 41; Father; 4 Christ; 15; Son 3; Spirit; 13. In Aulén, 1967, Chapter III, the Trinity as Father, Son and Spirit is much more prominent but the emphasis on the oneness of the tri-unity remains the same.

³³⁹ Aulén, 1954, 255; Aulén, 1931a, 285.

from the Psalms and prophets”.³⁴⁰ The ‘quiet’ Trinitarianism that Aulén discovered in his study of the NT, in the last analysis, is drowned out by the louder monotheistic impulses emanating from the OT *gudsbild*.

The dominance of the ‘oneness’ theme can also be seen in the discussions of agape in *DKG* and *DAKT* where God’s love is only discussed in relation to the work of Christ. Of course, this is essential, but there is no mention at all of the Father’s or the Spirit’s loves, nor does Aulén consider the Trinity as the originator of Divine Agape.³⁴¹

9.4.1. Possible Reasons for Rejection of the Familial Nomenclature for the Trinity

It is difficult to understand why Aulén avoids the familial terms for the Godhead. One possible reason might be related Aulén’s view of Harnack. I have already pointed out that Aulén’s stated aim was to bring out a different *gudsbild* than that of the influential the German theologian. Therefore, it is possible that he consciously wanted to reject Harnack’s version of the Gospel which the German summarised as, “the knowledge and recognition of God as the Father, the certainty of redemption, humility and joy in God, energy and brotherly love”.³⁴² Maybe Aulén viewed the usage of the name ‘Father’ as too closely associated with the German’s theology and was concerned people would misread him if he used the familial terms for the Godhead?

Another reason for Aulén’s avoidance of the familial terminology could be related to the nature of talk about religion. I observed when discussing Aulén’s cautionary acceptance of use of the word ‘person’ in relation to the Divine in *DAKT* that he believed that such a term contains a “symbolic character”.³⁴³ In his retirement he would make a major theme of this idea stating that “symbol language is the mother tongue of faith”.³⁴⁴ So, for Aulén the Divine Father-Son relationship is framed in the language “from the world of humans’ everyday life” but this should not be understood “literally” but “pictorially”.³⁴⁵ So, perhaps even at this much earlier stage of his life he was concerned that his readers would take the idea of “Father” too literally and view the Divine as though he was their own cosmic paternal being?

³⁴⁰ Aulén, 1927, 18. My trans. “Jesus övertar sin rena monoteistiska gudstro från psalmer och profeter”.

³⁴¹ See, for example, Aulén, 1927, 44-49 and Aulén, 1954, §14; Aulén, 1931a, §15.

³⁴² Harnack, 1908, Lecture XVI. Online: <https://ccel.org/ccel/harnack/christianity/christianity.i.html>

³⁴³ Aulén, 1931a, 190. My trans. “symbolisk karaktär”. Here the English translators opted for the non-literal phrase “a figure of speech”, see Aulén, 1954, 159.

³⁴⁴ Aulén, 1970, 89 and 90; Aulén, 1965b, 151 and 153. “Det symboliska språket är trons modersmål”. Linton’s translation of “modersmål” as “mother tongue” is correct and even today in Sweden this phrase is still used whereas in the UK the gender neutral “native tongue” is preferred.

³⁴⁵ The three words in quotation marks are all taken from Aulén, 1967, 49. My trans. “hämtats från människolivets värld”; “rent bokstavlig mening” and “bildkaraktär”.

But these are arguments from silence. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains even though he said the Creed each week at Mass it had little impact on his theology. A case in point is that Hebert gave his most famous work the title, *Christus Victor* rather than *Trinitas Victor*.

9.4.2. The Trinity in CV?

In *CV*, we see evidence of Aulén's avoidance of the familial name, "Father" in that the few times that name appears it is almost always used when he is quoting from the Church doctors.³⁴⁶ This is partly because he is putting more effort into refuting differing forms of Pelagianism, in concert with the antinomian focus in the previous chapter. So, the problem with the subjective theory, for example, is that it is entirely a "process that takes place in man".³⁴⁷ The objective theory also focuses on Jesus the man offering his life to God, although he admits that in this view of the atonement reconciliation is done as a result of "a divine initiative and a divine plan".³⁴⁸ By contrast Aulén's *CV* theory is a wholly a work of God, "accomplished by God Himself in Christ".³⁴⁹

Here we may also note the difficulty mentioned above, that it is hard to discern whether Aulén means the Father or the Trinity as the "He" in which salvation originated. If he had followed John 3:16 he could have seen that it is the Father who is the originator of Divine Agape, the monarchical cause of the reconciliation that comes through Christ the Son.

9.4.3. The Spirit's Role in Salvation in CV?

But if the exact identity of "God" is obscured in Aulén's writings, then further questions about the Trinitarian nature of Aulén's form of reconciliation can also be raised by looking at the issue of pneumatology. In fact, the Spirit's work in Christ's own oblation is not mentioned at all. Rather, on the rare occasions that the third person of the Trinity is named, it is in the application of Christ's victory to the believer today,³⁵⁰ an idea he earlier attributes to Athanasius.³⁵¹ Aulén's *CV* model of reconciliation appears to function without the Spirit at all, simply as a bipartite transaction between the Divine and the Christ. Aulén would have gained greater support for his emphasis on the divine work of God in reconciliation if he had laid greater stress on the pneumatic elements of the NT witness, such as Paul's declaration

³⁴⁶ In Aulén, 1931b, the "Father" is named in quotes by Irenaeus (22 and 24) and Gregory of Nazianzus (58); Aulén, 1930, 47, 50 and 104 respectively.

³⁴⁷ Aulén, 1931b, 146; Aulén, 1930, 146; "resultatet av vad som sker i människan".

³⁴⁸ My trans. Aulén, 1930, 245, "ett gudomligt initiativ och en gudomlig anordning".

³⁴⁹ Aulén, 1931b, 146, Aulén, 1930, 243–4 "en enda, fortgående gudshandling, utförd i och genom Kristus".

³⁵⁰ Aulén, 1931b, 150; Aulén 1930, 251.

³⁵¹ Aulén, 1931b, 59; Aulén 1930, 106.

that it was through the “Spirit of holiness”, that the Christ was “appointed the Son of God in power”.³⁵² He comes tantalisingly close to realising this when he quotes Hebrews 9:14 that says that Christ “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God”,³⁵³ only to round off his discussion in the next paragraph claiming that “We cannot go further here”.³⁵⁴ So, despite his intentions, Aulén again leaves his readers with a monist view of God missing the colour and richness a Trinitarian view could have given.

9.4.4. Aulén and Gunton’s Critique of Western Theology

Many of Gunton’s critiques about Western Trinitarian theology, and in particular Augustine’s doctrine of God, can be applied without modification to the views Aulén puts forward in his works.³⁵⁵ And that this is not just related to the difference between Reformed and Lutheran theologies can be seen in that American Lutheran, Robert W. Jenson (1930–2017) also develops a similar line of argument to Gunton.³⁵⁶

Firstly, in a more general comment, Gunton observes that Lutheran theology tends to be restrictive in what it says about the immanent Trinity and is more focused on God as he is “in and for us” than Reformed theology is.³⁵⁷ This can be seen across Aulén’s oeuvre and in his unwillingness to be too rational or speculative in his theology and his focus on Agape Love in the work of Christ, especially defined by the crucifixion, the ultimate act of God’s *pro nobis*. Partly, this limitation is defined by the Lundensian method which sees theology as an objective scientific study in the Christian faith as it is lived out. However, this itself is a product of the very same Lutheran tendency to focus on the observable economy rather than speculative theorising.

I have already alluded to Gunton’s comments which he has taken from Rahner, that by starting with *De Deo Uno*, that *De Deo Trino*, becomes superfluous³⁵⁸ a trend which can be seen in Aulén’s work. One of the consequences of this view is a tendency to flatten out the differences of the actions of the individual members of the Trinity, into the general work of ‘God’ without specifically identifying the differential roles that the three individual persons play.³⁵⁹ At its worst this can lead to modalism in that it appears to make no difference whether the Father, the Son or the Spirit is at work, such as when he writes about the Spirit’s work

³⁵² Rm 1:4.

³⁵³ Aulén, 1931b, 77; Aulén, 1930, 136.

³⁵⁴ Aulén, 1931b, 77; Aulén, 1930, 136 “kan icke här komma i fråga”.

³⁵⁵ See Gunton, 1997, Chapter 3.

³⁵⁶ See Jenson, 1997, 111-114.

³⁵⁷ Gunton, 1997, xvii.

³⁵⁸ Gunton, 1997, 32.

³⁵⁹ Jenson, 1997, 111 also sees this tendency in Augustine.

under the one heading of “Christ and the Spirit” in both *DKG* and *DAKT*.³⁶⁰ Here the distinction between Christ and the Spirit almost disappears so that, “to have the “mind of the Spirit” means nothing less than to have the “mind of Christ””.³⁶¹ To interpret him positively, Aulén is wanting to emphasise that the Spirit is not giving us a separate experience other than the one that can be experienced through Christ. But, at times, the wording is unclear and Gunton suggests that this is a risk endemic in Western theology.³⁶² And whilst British Catholic scholar, Lewis Ayres (b. 1966) is sceptical about Gunton’s analysis of Augustine,³⁶³ it is certainly fascinating that several of Gunton’s comments about the Latin Church Father seem to ring true in Aulén, who was a bishop in a denomination founded by a former Augustinian monk.

9.5. Conclusion

In continuity with the previous chapter, I have sought to show through the work of Stendahl and others involved in the NPP, that Trinitarianism is embedded in the NT witness reflecting that there is a change in *gudsbild* between the OT and NT. Aulén indirectly acknowledges this but does not make anything of it because of his concentration on the Law-Love relationship. However, Trinitarianism addresses a potential problem in the radical shift in *gudsbild* envisaged between the Testaments which seems to imply a change within God and the terms and conditions on which he is willing to meet His creature. By contrast Trinitarianism suggests a change in humans’ perception of God, that through revelation they see that God is more than a simplistic One, but rather a complex Three-In-One. But despite Aulén’s liturgical commitment to the Trinity in practice he makes almost no use of this idea in his theological reflections which ultimately reflects a deep seated focus on the Oneness of God over the Three. This is partly evident in his rejection of the familial terms for the names of the persons of the Godhead, and is abundantly clear in his *Christus Victor* view which sees reconciliation as a Spirit-free defeat of the devil worked out between a Divine Christ and God. All this seems to support Gunton’s thesis that western Christianity has been heavily focused on *De Deo Uno* at the expense of *De Deo Trino*.

³⁶⁰ See Aulén, 1927, 49-57 and §28 in Aulén 1954; Aulén, 1931a.

³⁶¹ This sentence appears in a paragraph which contains several similar sentences which liken Christ and the Spirit to each other in ways that it is difficult to see that there is any difference between them. My trans. “Att hava »Andens sinne» betyder icke något annat än att hava »Kristi sinne»” Aulén, 1927, 53.

³⁶² Gunton, 1997, 42.

³⁶³ Ayres, 2004, 384.

PART 4: CONCLUSION

Chapter 10. Further Study and Conclusion



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10.1. Further Study

Before rounding off this dissertation with a concluding review, I want to make a few suggestions for areas of further study. My research prior to writing this essay revealed that almost all the work on Aulén has centred on just two topics, the *CV* model of reconciliation and his *lex creationis* view. But this gives scope for a huge number of new studies based on the works of Aulén in many of the other areas of his thought outside these two themes. Existing papers on the Lund School's view of Augustine and another on the 20th-century Swedish interpretation of Luther's view of free will could certainly be the basis of further studies. Two areas which I have considered in a bit more depth as they pertain to Chapters 8 and 9 are Aulén's later view of the Law and his relationship to Barth.

10.1.1. Aulén and the Law after 1943

I have emphasised Aulén's earlier relationship to the Jewish religion, the OT and the Law as viewed almost exclusively through Luther's eyes as a Pelagian manifesto. However, Aulén

³⁶⁴ Photo of Bishop Gustaf Aulén kneeling at the altar in Strängnäs Cathedral, c 1950.

changed his view on the Law which can be seen in his *lex creationis*.³⁶⁵ Further study could examine how this move towards the seeing the Law as a gift of Agape Love in creation affected the more negative stance of his earlier work. Initially in the fourth edition of *DAKT* both positions appear side by side as though Aulén had not processed that a more positive view of creation might change his interpretation of the OT Law as a form of works-righteousness. Aulén does indirectly tell us why these two differing views appear in the one book. He tells us in the preface that the fourth edition was primarily a re-write of the last third of the book and that otherwise the text was the same as the third edition that I have used in this work.³⁶⁶ So whilst the re-written section contained his new view, the older view was left in unedited from the previous edition.

But by the time he wrote *Kristen Gudstro i Förändingens Värld* in 1967, the negative element in discussing the Law has almost totally disappeared. Only the Pharisees (not Judaism or the OT as a whole) are accused of “achievement-based-piety”³⁶⁷ and he comments that the Law has been used by some of its later *readers* to create a moralistic version of the religion, rather than saying that the Law itself is at fault for this moralism.³⁶⁸ So, there is a very different tone and it is said positively that the OT is about “God’s covenant with Israel and his bringing up, discipline and leading of that people”.³⁶⁹ Many questions could be raised about how and when this change took place and with six versions of *DAKT* and other works from his retirement, there is no shortage of material as a basis for further study, especially for those that have access to his Swedish texts to look at how Aulén’s theology of the Law changes and develops over time.

10.1.2. Aulén and Barth

The relationship between Barth and Aulén - or rather lack of it - is a possible area of further study. Barth put God the Trinity first in his reassessment of Christian theology in the light of the 19th-century’s anthropomorphism as exemplified by Schleiermacher. And whilst Aulén gives the same diagnosis to the problems of the previous century’s theology, his remedy is different – a renewed focus God’s Agape Love. I noted above that Sigurdson explains that the non-reception of Barth in Sweden was due to the fact in the first instance he was interpreted as a dialectic theologian who emphasised the absolute difference between God and humanity

³⁶⁵ Ljungh 2012, 183.

³⁶⁶ Aulén, 1943, 9. The reflection only appears in the Swedish edition of the work.

³⁶⁷ Aulén, 1967, My trans. “prestationsfromhet”.

³⁶⁸ Aulén, 1967, 58.

³⁶⁹ Aulén, 1967, 69. My trans. “Guds förbund med Israel, hans fostran, tuktan och ledning av detta folk”.

and was never able to shake this initial perception of his writings.³⁷⁰ So, Barth's reformed theology never found a home in Lutheran Sweden, not least because up unto the 1950s Sweden had their own *via media*, the Lundensian School, that the rest of the world was also interested in. During his long retirement from 1955, Aulén moved back to Lund both geographically and mentally, using the time to consider the latest theological trends, but the works he produced does not suggest he was poring over the latest publications of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* in the original German, which Aulén could read fluently. Rather it was the theologies of Lutherans such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich that interested him.³⁷¹ Is there more that can be said about Aulén and Barth? Does Sigurdson interpretation of Aulén's view on Barth measure up with the references to the Swiss Reformer in Aulén's works? For example, Aulén's views in *DAKT*, outlined above, speak with much more awareness of a separation of the divine and human than his earlier work in *DKG*.

But now let me return to this project which has focused on Aulén's theology in the narrow window of time between 1927–1931.

10.2. Conclusion

My initial research question was: *what is Aulén's picture-of-God and how do theological developments which occurred after his death help in re-evaluating this view of Agape Love?* In short, my answer is that Aulén viewed God's Agape Love as "spontaneous, self-giving, free and sovereign". By considering the OT in a more positive light in lieu of the views promoted by the NPP, and in emphasising the Trinitarian aspects of the Christian *gudsbild* that can be seen in the NT, a richer and more nuanced picture of God as Agape Love can be seen.

I have developed this answer in depth in this essay which started with the premise that whilst *CV* is Aulén's most well-known work, it does not represent the centre of his thought which is focused on God's Agape Love. I have shown this by looking at the motivations given to reconciliation in *CV* and then looking at the first edition of *DKG* and the third edition of *DAKT* which clearly outlines a central motif, the Christian *gudsbild* as agape. I have summarised Aulén definition of love as "spontaneous, self-giving, free and sovereign". In this essay I do not question this deeply Christocentric reading, or more accurately, a cruciform interpretation of God's love but rather seek to enhance and give his ideas an even firmer

³⁷⁰ Sigurdson, 1996, Chapter 2.

³⁷¹ All three authors are discussed on multiple occasions in Aulén, 1970; Aulén 1965. Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison* and Tillich's *Courage to Be* are given as suggested reading to accompany Chapter 6 "Salvation – from what?" see Aulén, 1967, 189.

grounding in the whole of the Scriptures and spread out from just Christ on the Cross towards a more fully Trinitarian approach. I have chosen these two areas because I perceive in his work an over-emphasis on the Law-Love dichotomy of the two Testaments and an underemphasis on the three persons of the Trinity as the Divine agents of Agape Love. By reinterpreting the Law along the lines suggested by E.P. Sanders' "covenantal nomism" schema, God's Agape Love can be seen as deeply rooted in the fabric of the OT faith so that the God of the whole Christian canon can be said to be a God of Love, not just the God of the NT, as Aulén's interpretation would have it.

In the process of putting forward this argument I have also suggested that there is a link between the reinterpretation of the Jewish-Christian relationship promoted by advocates of the NPP and Aulén and his contemporaries' dismissal of the Law. That link is Krister Stendahl who was ordained in the *Svenska Kyrka* who did all his theological training in a milieu dominated by the Law-Love dichotomy characteristic of Aulén's thinking. I have posited that Stendahl's seminal paper on the Paul and the "West", which was written first in Swedish just six years after his arrival in the USA, should be read contextually as Stendahl the Swedish Lutheran criticising the views he imbibed whilst growing up and studying in Sweden for the first 33 years of his life, a time which dovetails with Aulén's role as Professor of Systematic Theology in Lund. So Aulén's link to the NPP is that he was promoting exactly the kind of interpretation of the Law that these later scholars reject. Furthermore, the NPP reinterpretation is not just a reappraisal of Luther's view but specifically a critique of the Swedish Lutheran interpretation of Luther that was dominant in the country in the 1940s and 1950s.

Having assessed one element of Aulén's interpretation of Agape Love from an exegetical point of view, in the penultimate chapter I looked at his view from within his own discipline, that of systematic theology. In particular, I question the limited role the Trinity plays in Aulén's cruciform interpretation of God's love. Again Stendahl, who was heavily involved in Jewish-Christian inter-faith dialogue in his career, points the way in suggesting that one of the essential elements of the NT *gudsbild* is that it is Trinitarian in character. Aulén does talk about the Trinity as a facet of theological thinking and the church's liturgical life because they are unavoidable elements of the Christian witness about God. But he does not follow up his thoughts partly, I suggest, because his differentiation between Law-Love masks alternative contrasts that might exist between the Testaments, in particular, the more important shift in *gudsbild* from monotheism and Trinitarianism. This could also be due to an overemphasis on *De Deo Uno* in comparison to *De Deo Trino* which can be clearly seen in

CV, not least because of the complete lack on any mention of the Spirit's work in Christ's redemptive act. An emphasis on the Trinitarian nature of God would automatically have led Aulén to not neglect the pneumatological elements of God's act of reconciliation. It would also have helped with an intrinsic problem with his Law-Love *gudsbild* which posits a fundamental change in the character of God and his dealings with humanity. The move from monotheism to Trinitarianism helps to explain some of the elements of discontinuity between the Testaments without positing the seismic change that Aulén's idea would entail. He is suggesting a dramatic and fundamental shift in the terms of God's *pro nobis* from the last page of Malachi to the first page of Matthew in the Christian Scriptures. An emphasis on the Trinity allows for a dramatic change, but moves this transformation to the point of human's reception and understanding of the nature of God. It is not a change in *God* as Aulén suggests, but a change in *our perception* of God, a deeper, rather than opposing, revelation of the character of God in the light of the Christ event which is complementary rather than contradictory to the saving acts of God in the Exodus.

All in all, I believe a Trinitarian interpretation of love is an enhancement to Aulén's cruciform version of agape. When a more holistic view of the divine acts of God is considered, embracing the OT and the Trinity, then He is seen to be even more "spontaneous, self-giving, free and sovereign" in His Agape Love. Aulén tendency towards monism therefore misses out on the fullness of riches that the Biblical picture of God as a Trinitarian God of Divine Agape. However, in one page-long paragraph in *DKG*, he does write two separate sentences that show how tantalisingly close he was to a more rounded *gudsbild* that embraced the Trinity and agape:

The **God**, who comes close to us in **Christ** and in the **Spirit**, is here in his presence as the creator of the new and is the God who comes into close fellowship with humans who are sinful and separated from God"... "And this view of the God-fellowship and of God's presence is obviously related in the most intimate way the gospel's characteristic picture-of-God: **that of sovereign love**.³⁷²

That is to say, the God we experience in close fellowship as the Trinity, is the God of Agape Love.

³⁷² Bold type is my own emphasis. The first sentence is from Aulén, 1927, 53–54. My trans. "Den Gud, som är oss när i Kristus och i Anden, är i denna sin närvaro den nyskanpade, är den Gud som inträder i innerligaste gemenskap med den syndiga och från Gud skilda människan". The second sentence is from Aulén, 1927, 54. My trans. "Och denna syn på gudsgemenskapen och på Guds närvaro står uppenbarligen i intimaste samband med evangeliet s karaktäristiska gudsbild: den suveräna kärlek" 54.

PART 5. ENDNOTES

Chapter 11. Endnotes

11.1. Appendix: The Opportunities and Challenges of Bilingualism

I have been very fortunate that *ALT* accepts assignments written in English, as without this I would not have been able to complete my Masters studies. That is because whilst I can understand and communicate in Swedish, my level of language is not up to university level.

I have made matters more complicated by choosing to write in English about a Swedish theologian and, for that matter, a theologian whose books that were written nearly 100 years ago. English speaking theologians, John Gresham Machen (Presbyterian) and William Temple (Anglican) were just three years younger than Aulén, whilst Henry Orten Wiley (Nazarene) was born the same year as the Swede to give English readers a sense of the difference 100 years can make in the development of a European language. One noticeable difference is that Aulén uses »...», or angular quotations marks that both point to the right (known as *guillemets*) for his quotes, which is not the current practice in modern Swedish.

I made the decision to quote Aulén (and all Swedish publications I have used in the main body of the text) in English to make my work as widely accessible as possible. Where I can, I have tried to make use of the existing English translations of these texts, even when the translation is not as literal as I might prefer. Occasionally, I have used my own translation when I have felt that the existing English translations stray too far from the point Aulén was wanting to make. In the footnotes the reference to the English version of Aulén's texts is always given first and then the Swedish original. Every quote from a Swedish book is given in English in the main body of the text, and Swedish in the footnotes.

11.1.1. Note on Translations Used

In this section I note which versions of Aulén's texts and translations I have used.

For *Den Kristna Guds bilden* (1927), I have used the first Swedish edition and have made my own translations of the text as there are no English versions available.

I have used the third edition of the Swedish version of *Den Allmänneliga Kristna Tron* (1931). However, this edition was never translated into English as the first English version of this text is from the fourth edition of the book that was published in Swedish in 1943. That

English version of the book was called *The Faith of the Christian Church* and was translated by Wahlström and Arden in 1954, hence it is called Aulén (1954) in my essay. At first sight it may seem strange to use the English version of the fourth edition of *Den Allmänneliga Kristna Tron* to translate the third Swedish edition. However, Aulén tells us in the preface to the fourth Swedish edition that the text in the first two-thirds of the book has not changed between the third and fourth editions.³⁷³ In fact, I have discovered that even in the final third much of the text is the also the same. Therefore, I have used the first English translation of *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Aulén, 1954) to translate the third edition of *Den Allmänneliga Kristna Tron* (Aulén, 1931a) on most occasions.

However, it is when it comes to Hebert's translation of *Christus Victor* (known here as Aulén, 1931b), that the issue of translation is much more problematic. In changing the title of the book from *Den Kristna Försoningstanken* to *Christus Victor*, it gives away his tendency to often choose to paraphrase Aulén rather than translate what he wrote word for word as Wahlström and Arden did for *The Faith of the Christian Church*. But because Aulén says in his autobiography that he preferred Hebert's title and that his translation was "very skilfully done",³⁷⁴ I have used the name *Christus Victor* throughout and tried to use Hebert's English text as much as possible leaving comments in the footnotes where I feel his translation differs from a literal rendering of Aulén's words.

11.1.2. Note on Swedish Grammar

I have tried to make this text accessible to readers who do not have any knowledge of Swedish. However, any investigation of Aulén cannot escape the fact that he wrote in that language and that certain terms are difficult to translate. In Swedish when wanting to use the definite article about a noun, for example to say "the church", the ending of the word changes so that noun "*kyrka*" becomes noun and definitive article "*kyrkan*". But in this essay when using a Swedish noun and the definite article I have chosen to write "the *kyrka*" so that the root noun I using is not lost in the variety of endings that can be used. I hope this makes the text readable for non-Swedish speakers whilst giving them a sense of the Swedish context in which Aulén lived, and I apologise to my Swedish readers that this makes for a slightly unnatural way of reading words they are familiar with.

11.1.3. Words – God's Love, Agape

³⁷³ Aulén, 1943, 9. The reflection only appears in the Swedish edition of the work.

³⁷⁴ Aulén, 1975, 119. My trans. "mycket skickligt gjorda".

I will be following Aulén's way of writing "agape" in his Swedish texts, i.e., without italics, capitalisation or use of the transliterated letter, *ē*, for the last letter.³⁷⁵ This format it not always followed in all English translations. I will, however, use my own phrases "Agape Love" and "Divine Agape" with capitalisation.

³⁷⁵ See, for example, Aulén, 1931a, 165.

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11.3. Sources Of Photos for Each Chapter

Chapter 1. Lund University, c 1900.

<https://www.turistinformationlund.se/upplevelser/universitetsstaden/historia/>

Chapter 2. Lund University Library, 1929.

<https://www.turistinformationlund.se/upplevelser/universitetsstaden/historia/>

Chapter 3. Lund Domkyrkan, 1927. <https://archive.org/details/arkivkopia.se-ublu-6455>
(cropped)

Chapter 4. My own photo of the cover of *Den Kristna Försoningtanken*

Chapter 5. My own photo of the cover of *Den Kristna Guds bilden*

Chapter 6. My own photo of the cover of *Den Allmänneliga Kristna Tron*

Chapter 7. My own photo of a collection of books by Gustaf Aulén used in this essay

Chapter 8. Gustaf Aulén, 1907. <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/Presentation.aspx?id=18911>

Chapter 9. Gustaf Aulén 1924. <https://archive.org/details/arkivkopia.se-ublu-14214>

Chapter 10. Gustaf Aulén, c. 1950. <https://sokisamlingar.sormlandsmuseum.se/objects/c24-357783/>

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